



# THAT WAS SOKOL

*to byl Sokol*

ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF LEGENDARY SOKOL  
MARIE PROVAZNÍKOVÁ'S BOOK AND A SUMMARY OF HER LIFE

# **THAT WAS SOKOL**

## ***to byl Sokol***



**English Translation of Legendary Sokol  
Marie Provazníková's Book and a Summary of Her Life**

**Robert J. Tomanek, Editor**

### **Contributors**

**Norma Zabka, Zuzka Polesny Eggena, Magda Polesny Schay,  
Anna VA Polesny, and Jitka Ludmila Zobal-Ratner**

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Sokol Museum and Library gratefully acknowledges the individuals who contributed to the development and production of this publication. David Muhlena, Library Director of the National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library (NCSML), has served as a consultant for the electronic version of the book that is readily available free of charge. Paul Soderdahl, Director of Library Information Technology at the University of Iowa played an important role in resolving problems related to scanned images of the hand typed translation. Lori and Dean Rathje, NewLeaf Media Inc., prepared the manuscript for publication. Finally, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic has provided grant support for this project.

## COVER PHOTOS

Front: Marie Provazníková in foreground; in background, the 1938 All-Sokol Slet.

Marie Provazníková composed the calisthenic drill performed  
by 30,000 women seen in this photo.

Back, top: Women performing a drill with ribbons at the 1948 Slet in Prague.

Bottom right: Parade in Prague celebrating the 1948 Slet. Bottom left: Provazníková's *French Legion of Honor* medal (green), the highest French honor, and her *Order of St. Sava* medal for meritorious achievements, awarded by Serbia. The gold medal is the one awarded to the Czechoslovakia's women's gymnastics team that placed first in the 1948 Olympics, held in London.

Published by Sokol Museum & Library

8936 Gloucester Rd.

Wood Ridge, IL 60517

[www.sokolmuseum.org](http://www.sokolmuseum.org)

© 2024 Sokol Museum & Library

ISBN: 9798332510311

# CONTENTS

## PART I

Provazníková and Her Book.....	1
--------------------------------	---

## PART II

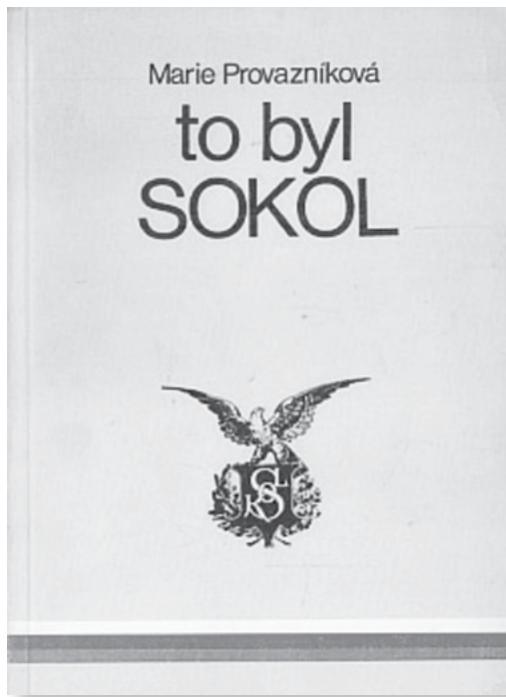
PREFACE	Marie Provazníková: <i>That Was Sokol</i> .....	7
CHAPTER 1	The End of the XIX Century.....	9
CHAPTER 2	The Begining of the Twentieth Century 1900–1918 .....	13
CHAPTER 3	From Slavery to Freedom — 1918.....	35
CHAPTER 4	In a Liberated Country.....	45
CHAPTER 5	From VII to VIII Slets, 1920–1926.....	49
CHAPTER 6	From the VIII to the IX Slet, 1926–1932 .....	71
CHAPTER 7	From the IX to the X Slet (1932–1938).....	81
CHAPTER 8	The Protectorate .....	99
CHAPTER 9	The Dawn of Liberty.....	21
CONCLUSION	.....	161

## PART III

New Life in America (1949–1991).....	163
Selected Writings of Marie Provazníková.....	163
Marie Provazníková:her professional and family life .....	167



# PART I



## PROVAZNÍKOVÁ AND HER BOOK

Marie Provazníková's historically significant book (*to byl Sokol*) traces the Sokol movement from the first decade of the 20th century to 1948 when the communists closed the movement's doors. The current publication provides additional information to the English translation of her book (*That was Sokol*), with the aim of revealing more about the author's work and her personal life, thus telling "the rest of the story." To that end, the last section of this publication includes: 1) English translations of a few of her articles, 2) summary of her Sokol work in the US after 1948 and 3) her family life in the US.

### HER STORY

*That was Sokol*, is a historical memoir by the legendary Sokol Marie Provazníková, that was published only in Czech in 1988. Fortunately, Emilie Martinet, Albert Pokorny and Grace Cahlander, members of Sokol Baltimore, translated this important work in 1991. Because the translation was not published, and an electronic version was lacking, the Sokol Museum and

Library worked to realize the goal of publishing an English version of this important book. This process was aided by contributions from Provazníková's three granddaughters (Zuzka Polesny Egggeny, Magda Polesny Shay and Anna V. Polesny) and Norma Zabka, of Sokol New York, and a camper/student Jitka Ludmila Zobal-Ratner. *To byl Sokol* is a detailed history of the Sokol movement and its role in the important struggles of the Czech people during their lives under the Austrian and Austro-Hungarian Empires, and World War I, and then under oppression by Nazi Germany during World War II, and communism from 1948-1989.

This historical memoir contains considerable information that cannot be found elsewhere, because it is first-hand and came from the detailed notes and memory of the author. One must appreciate that Marie Provazníková held numerous important positions and knew many historically significant people, including the first two presidents of the Czechoslovak Republic

(Masaryk and Beneš), and other heads of state. Her contributions to physical education, gymnastics (including the Federation of International Gymnastics and Olympics) and Sokol culture are unparalleled.

Marie Provazníková lived the first 58 years of her life in Bohemia and her story begins when she joined Sokol at the age of seven. Her historical memoir consists of details that are both historical and personal, including her opinions regarding people who played roles in the Sokol organization, politics and her own life. Many of the details may appear excessive. However, they provide insights into her life and her responses to the numerous challenges she faced. Her book is especially unique for several reasons. First, it links Sokol and its history with Czech history and nationhood. Second, she was personally involved with the events described and, in many cases, influenced by or personally affected by the events. Finally, and most importantly, there is no other publication that has provided such an integrated documentation of Sokol's historic development and struggles during the first half of the twentieth century. As Provazníková herself notes, Sokol's historical information has not been preserved very often.

In reading her book, I discovered that Marie Provazníková's words were so personal that I felt that she was speaking to me as an old friend. She shares the emotions associated with the events she experienced. Her story reveals her schooling, her family life, and motivations underscoring the tasks she performed. Her life was characterized by courage, purpose, determination, sacrifice, devotion, and loyalty to her country, and to the virtues of the Sokol movement. Yet, her story reveals her humanness including her fears, conflicts and disappointments. Her story provides key insights into the workings of the Sokol organization, including leadership struggles and conflicts, the role of Sokol in the two world wars, and the notable contribution of Sokol to the foundation of the new country — Czechoslovakia — in 1918. Provazníková provides nuances that are not found elsewhere, and her documentation details an accurate history of the Sokol movement. Her book also addresses the relationship of the Czech Sokol with the other Slavic Sokols and with the American Sokol Organization and Sokol USA (Slovak Sokol).

Provazníková's historical memoir reveals the author's frankness concerning all the events of her life. Although she is not egotistical, she frankly states her important contributions to Sokol, international gymnastics, Czech self-rule and independence. Her book details the planning for the Sokol Slets (festivals, gatherings) which were unparalleled anywhere in the world. Her travels enabled her meetings with various international leaders, as she describes the interpersonal relationships that affected the Sokol movement and even the history of Europe. Her experiences abroad document a record of Sokol's influence on other nations. An important facet of her story is the importance of Sokol and the role it played in the Czech (and later Czechoslovak) Legions during World War I, and its role in the resistance and underground during World War II. These years of her life were characterized by challenges of survival, including outsmarting the enemy. Marie Provazníková received many international awards and is recognized for her work in human and women's rights.

Why was this critically important historical memoir unavailable, and why haven't its contents been discussed in some detail during more than three decades since it was written? Three factors have contributed to the unavailability of this information. First, it was written only in Czech, and the number of copies was limited. Second, it was published in 1988, during the communist era when Sokol was banned in Czechoslovakia. Finally, the type-written translation into English in 1991 was not circulated and required editing. For these reasons this vital historical document needs to be preserved for all generations.

## THE EDITED ENGLISH VERSION

The unpublished version of *To byl Sokol* has been reviewed, edited, and diacriticals added to Czech names and words. The original translation was revised to utilize common English terms and structure. Editorial comments have been provided for the purpose of clarity and context. This was an essential inclusion, because the author wrote the book primarily for her Sokol brothers and sisters in response to their many requests and questions. She provided critical information that only she could provide, because she recorded and lived the events described. Sadly, a historical gap began in 1948 with the

take-over by communists and lasted for 42 years. Marie Provazníková represents a singular source of many decades of the role of Sokol in the lives of the Czech people. The current edited book includes a summary of her life intended to provide a closer look at the legendary Sokol woman who courageously fought for human rights and a Czech nation. This Introduction includes information about the Sokol movement, individuals frequently noted in her book, abbreviations and some key references.

## THE SOKOL MOVEMENT

The desire of the Czech people to have their own nation was persistent during their time under the Austrian Habsburgs. To gain their independence, a movement began in 1862 when a philosopher, Miroslav Tyrš, with the help of a wealthy and dedicated man, Jindřich Fügner, established Sokol Prague, a gymnastics club. Sokol (meaning falcon) grew rapidly, as indicated by the presence of 114 clubs and 10,516 members by 1871

in Bohemia and Moravia. Gymnastics served as the basis of the Sokol movement whose goal was to inspire and motivate Czech people and revive a personal and national consciousness and ethnic identity. This goal emphasized concepts of democracy, equality, brotherhood, liberty and civic responsibility. As detailed in Marie Provazníková's book, Sokol played a vital role in Czechoslovakia's history and culture. Sokol, both the organization and its members, played important leadership roles during the two world wars. In World War I, Sokols, because of their own training, led the legionnaires (the Czechs and later Slovaks who fought on the side of the allies). In World War II, the underground resistance, during the Nazi occupation in Bohemia and Moravia, was organized by Sokols. Provazníková's experiences, during the two world wars, described in her book, provide many insights into the Czech's determination for freedom and self-governance.

## INDIVIDUALS FREQUENTLY NOTED BY PROVAZNÍKOVÁ

### Beneš, Edvard (1884–1948)

Czechoslovak president, 1935–1938 and 1945–1948; Beneš was a life-long Sokol member and supporter of the Sokol movement.

### Bukovský, Stanislav

Sokol president in the 1920s; active in the Sokol resistance in WWII; he died in the Auschwitz Concentration Camp in 1941.

### Erben, František

Competed in international gymnastics (1900–1910) and was known for his teaching of gymnastics and his publications on the subject; he served as Sokol Director of Men and was executed by the Nazis in 1942.

### Heller, Agathon

Director of Men in the 1930s; he worked closely with Provazníková, the Director of Women during this golden era of Sokol.

### Hřebík, Antonín

Active in the Sokol resistance in World War II and was sent to Auschwitz in 1941; Sokol President (1945–1948); he was removed as president because of his refusal to sign a loyalty agreement with the Communist government; later he immigrated to Chicago where he was active in Czech affairs and American Sokol Organization.

### Kavalír, Miroslav

A physician who trained physical educators, published papers and books on physiology and orthopedics, and served as Director of Men; he was imprisoned by the Nazis during World War II.

### Klinger, Miroslav

Competed in 1920 Olympics and was a Sokol president, 1932–1939; arrested by Nazis and committed to a concentration camp during World War II; his loyalty to the Communist party was rewarded by membership in the Czechoslovak parliament (1948–1960).

### **Masaryk, Tomáš (1850–1939)**

A philosophy professor, and a life-long Sokol member, who was the first president of the Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1935); his daughter, Olga was a classmate of Marie Provažníková. During the First World War, Masaryk received the support of Sokols and their leaders in forming the Czecho-Slovak Legions, a group of men who joined the Allies in their fight against Germany and Austria. He stated, “Without Sokols there would be no Legions, and without Legions there would be no Czechoslovakia.”

### **Očenášek, Augustin**

Known for his numerous writings on gymnastics and physical education systems, he played a major role in the development of gymnastics exercises and rhythmicics for women; he incorporated the Jaques Dalcroze gymnastics system of training into the Sokol system, and was an effective organizer of Slets.

### **ČOS (Česká Obec Sokolska)**

Czech Union Sokol before 1919 (and since 1992), Czechoslovak Union after 1919.

### **CSR (Czechoslovak Republic)**

Official name for the first Republic from 1918–1939 and from 1945–1948; in 1948 the Communist Government changed the name to Czechoslovak Social Republic.

### **European Union of Gymnastics**

Czech Sokol joined in 1900.

### **Fédération Internationale de Gymnastique (FIG)**

Governing body for all gymnastics since 1903 for men and since 1934 for women.

### **Slet**

A gathering or festival featuring a large exhibition of gymnasts performing calisthenics and dances,

### **Pechlát, Agustín**

A psychologist, played a major role in training gymnasts and was Sokol Director of Men, and later Sokol's president; he was Tyrš' pupil and published reviews of Tyrš' work; his work in the Sokol Resistance caused his execution by the Nazis in 1941.

### **Scheiner, Josef**

Heir of Miroslav Tyrš, Scheiner served as Sokol president from 1906 to the year of his death in 1932. He wrote many works regarding Sokol and was editor of the Sokol Gazette. During World War I gave Sokol funds and some of his own to Masaryk for the support of the Czecho-Slovak Legion; Scheiner supported international gymnastics competition and led Sokol into the International Gymnastic Federation.

### **Vaníček, Jindra**

Served as Sokol Director of Men (1892-1930), during the time when ČOS, Sokol's governing body, was established and Sokol experienced its greatest growth; Vaníček supported women in the Sokol movement and directed six Sokol Slets; he also published the Sokol Gazette (*Věstník*).

## **NOTES**

and competitions in gymnastics and other sports. Participants include all age groups and both sexes. National or International Sokol Slets, held every six years, featured thousands of gymnasts performing on the field, with as many as 250,000 thousand spectators viewing the performance. Gymnastic competition includes four levels of skills: low, intermediate, high and championship; a Slet also includes competitions in other sports; parades, concerts, and other cultural events.

### **Sokol Training Groups**

As noted by Provažníková, the youngest Sokol participants are called “little boys” and “little girls,” these groups are pre-teens; junior girls 13–17, and junior boys 14–18; seniors are 17 years (women) and 18 years (men) and older.

**THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF LEGENDARY SOKOL  
MARIE PROVAZNÍKOVÁ'S BOOK  
AND A SUMMARY OF HER LIFE**

The goal of this publication is to put Provazníková's life into perspective, by providing information concerning her work, family life and her contributions to her beloved nation, including freedom and human and women's rights. Her book focuses on Sokol before 1949.

The current book includes her life in the United States up to her death in 1991, which included her family (daughter, son-in law, and granddaughters), American Sokol Organization, Sokols Abroad, and international gymnastics.

**SELECTED REFERENCES**

Dusek PP Jr. *Marie Provazník: Her Life and Contributions to Physical Education*. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Utah, 1981.

Kolár F, Kössl J. Origin and Development of the Czech and Czechoslovak Olympic Committee. *Journal of Olympic History* 2:11-26, 1994.

Nolte CE. *Training for National Maturity: Miroslav Tyrš and the origin of the Czech sokol, 1862-1884*. Thesis, Columbia University, New York, 1990.

Nolte CE. *The Sokol in the Czech Lands to 1914. Training for the Nation*. Palgrave McMillan, Great Britain 2011.

Nolte CE. "Every Czech a Sokol!" feminism and Nationalism in the Czech Sokol Movement. *Austrian History yearbook* 24:79-100, 1993.

Pánek J, Tuma O, et. al. *A History of the Czech Lands*. Charles university, Prague 2009.

Provazníková M. *Výklad Tyršovy Soustavy a Názvosloví*. Edited by Rudolf Němeček, Salem Oregon, 1985.

Provazníková M. *To byl Sokol*, Sokol Mnichov, J Schweigert Co. KG, 1988.

Provazníková M. *Sto Let Sokola*. Orbis Printing Co. Inc. New York, 1962.

Šotola V. *Struggles and Development of the Women's Sokol Movement as Illustrated by the Life of Marie Provazníková*.

Tomanek RJ. *Czech Immigrants and the Sokol Movement*. Penfield Books, Iowa City IA, 2020.

Robert J. Tomanek, Editor  
Iowa City, Iowa 2024



Marie Provaříková at the time of defection, 1948.

## PART II

### P R E F A C E



# MARIE PROVAZNÍKOVÁ: THAT WAS SOKOL

Memories are the most precious things we take with us when we depart from our homeland. Of course, memories are also precious to the sisters and brothers who remain behind, imprisoned there without benefit of the companionship of our beloved Sokol Organization.

Many requests for me to write my memoirs came from the large number of sisters and brothers who had remained behind in Czechoslovakia. These included the young members born in the 1930s who had experienced the brief flash of Sokol's freedom during the period 1945-1948, as well as the many later exiles, including the swarms of people who departed after 1968. All these requesters expressed their deep need to form for themselves a new Sokol organization like what they heard about from their parents and grandparents.

When all hopes for repatriation of the exiles faded, as did their attempts to form new Sokol units in their adopted countries, many requests for advice and answers to questions were received. Primarily they wanted to know why they had not been successful in repeating the surprising results achieved by a small nation of 10 million people, which became recognized as the greatest gymnastic power in the entire world.

I attempted to answer these questions through a series of lectures, by teaching in many instructor clinics and by writing many articles for Sokol related publications. However, due to the pressures of my normal existence, as well as my contributions to Sokol, there remained no time for me to answer all the questions and comply with all the requests.

The event which brought home to me my responsibility to write my memoirs and compelled me to assemble all my faculties for the task at hand was an event

which occurred in Naperville, Illinois in 1977. There, I was asked by instructor Linhart, of Sokol Tabor, to speak to the students of the American Sokol Organization's Instructors Course describing the Czechoslovak Sokol (ČOS). I was surprised by this request and, of course, immediately recognized the urgent need to discuss something which would hold the interest of the students. I decided to discuss the events that took place on October 18, 1918, at the birth of the Czechoslovak nation. On that day, the Czech Organization of Sokol was requested by the National Committee to take charge of resolving the pressing problem facing the new nation. During these dangerous and difficult days, before the government could be strengthened and a new army, police force and other official structures formed, Sokols manned the organizations necessary to operate the country.

For an entire hour the students listened to my story almost without breathing. Because of this experience, I realized that what I had to say about ČOS was new to Sokols in America and around the world, as they had neither lived through nor learned about these events. This gave me the encouragement and strength to start my task.

**EDITORIAL COMMENT.** This was the onset of Provazníková's more complete understanding of the differences between Czech Sokol and American Sokol. Members of the latter were now generations removed from their relatives who immigrated from Bohemia and Moravia.

Subsequent events proved to me that the task was going to be more difficult than I had imagined. Primarily, because there seemed to be an absence of resource material for use in developing my memoirs. Neither the Czech American Sokols, nor the Federation of

Slovak American Sokols had central libraries. ČOS had published many documents which were distributed to its members, but somehow these documents had either been lost or scattered to homes or units where I had no access to them. It was at this time that my personal situation and increasing years forced me to move to the American West where I found it difficult to locate capable helpers who were willing to contribute their services on a volunteer basis. Naturally, everyone was busy with their own family and employment, and professional hires did not have knowledge of the Czech language. Finally, I also found it difficult to assemble my data due to the long distances involved and the scattered locations of my sources of information.

In the end, the biggest help came from the sisters and brothers who remained in my homeland. There, somehow or other, these brothers and sisters found ways to send me all types of material until my bookshelves were stocked to overflowing. I received all types of printed lists, including instructor assemblies and ČOS committee rosters active during the period from 1919 to 1940, which was almost to the end of Sokol in Czechoslovakia. However, because of my increasing age, the work was slowing down. My vision became an increasing problem, almost to the point of my total inability to do independent work. These then are the reasons why these memoirs have taken so long and are limited in scope.

In these initial memoirs, I have limited myself to the period of Sokol's growth and bloom. Later, I intend to cover the Sokol in exile, which began in 1951. I realize the monumental task I have set for myself, and God will-

ing, I will try to assemble and summarize the activities of the new Sokol. In this way, something concerning the period in exile will be recorded for history. I am aware of the heavy responsibility that I have assumed for myself.

It is not an easy task to choose from a large quantity of unfinished memories. Decisions must be made concerning the continuity of development and the impact of the factors that directly or indirectly influenced various events. Additionally, how does one explain the atmosphere, the manner of thought processes plus life and conditions at the time definitive decisions were made? We must be adroit enough to choose events which were happy and those which were sad. Also, we must be able to highlight our victories, our failures, and our disappointments. Because life is a constant struggle between good and evil and we all experience both, if we are to be successful, we must be able to distinguish between them to identify our successes and failures. Mistakes and errors are also a part of life. How Sokol handled them and subsequently reduced their recurrence provide an interesting analysis.

It is not for me to judge the conduct or decisions made by the ČOS. It is important I try to explain how Sokol thought and how it overcame the obstacles which stood in the way of progress. My objective will have been achieved if it can be determined what kinds of influences Sokol had on the Nation, and on its history. Of these influences, what should be kept for the future and what, if any, can be used under the now unfolding and changed circumstances? When we can answer these questions, we will understand this phenomenon called "Sokol."



## THE END OF THE XIX CENTURY

### KARLÍN

#### **This is what Sokol looked like when I joined**

My story begins a few days before the turn of the century where at the tender age of approximately seven, a girl-friend, during recess in school, whispered to me, "I go to Sokol! It is very nice. Why don't you go there too?"

Imagine my surprise when my mother reacted favorably to my request and added that she had not only attended Sokol classes, herself, but also had many happy memories of the organization. We immediately set about finding out where the small girl classes were conducted and what the gym suit requirements would be.

At the turn of the century, the living standard was undeniably lower than today. Still, no one would have even thought of attending Sokol gym classes in other than the prescribed uniform, for such was the high esteem in which Sokol was held. On the evening of my request, my mother and I went to witness a gym class and arrange for my attendance. Within a week, I was proudly strutting to my first gym class in my prescribed uniform. I was now a member of the small girl's class and my life-time dedication to Sokol had begun.

In the eighty years since that day, my life has been linked to Sokol and I have gained the benefit of my experiences. I can testify to what I saw and heard. I can speak of the good times and the bad; and finally, I can describe Sokol's development, its glorious zenith and its decline.

The 20th century brought with it the tides of change. The barriers that maintained Sokol as a purely male organization were put aside and women became full partners. In the past, Brother Sokols viewed the Sokol Organization a secret Czech Army to be educated, if necessary, and to assume control of the country on the day

of liberation. Of course, none of this information was in writing nor was it openly discussed, but the final objective of freeing Bohemia and Moravia from Hapsburg bondage was always on their minds and remained the final aim.

The original physical training union organization of Prague Ladies and Girls was based on Dr. Miroslav Tyrš' initiative. Unfortunately, the few organizations that were followers soon stopped their efforts. But out of these initial efforts came the resurgence of a women's movement in Sokol which evolved into a solid women's organization staffed and managed by women. It was women who prescribed how they would dress, what customs and codes of conduct they would follow and how they would be managed. In the larger cities, such, as Prague, advances in the women's movement were more rapid because the organization was staffed by respected leaders and other distinguished women of the nation. But in the smaller cities, which did not have such women, progress was slower. Despite these handicaps, the women's role in Sokol continued to grow and their full participation in Sokol activities was achieved. In Moravia, the women were more courageous and, perhaps, more aggressive than in the other regions and, therefore, more successful. In Prague, the most successful and aggressive unit in advancing women's roles in Sokol was Prague's Sokol Vyšehrad where leadership was provided by the families of Heller and Tuček. There, they succeeded in admitting women as full members of Sokol with the understanding they would pay the same dues as men and have the same rights to exercise in classes held twice a week. In gym classes, advancement to leadership roles was based on leadership qualities but, such roles on the Board of Instructors were retained by men. Women's classes were

taught by women, and women received instruction from instructors of women's teams.

At the turn of the century, Karlín, the city where I lived, was an independent city located north of Prague. Its primary purpose was to function as a food source for the City of Prague. It was a somewhat sleepy and conservative city which could not afford cultural activities because there wasn't room to grow. There were no tall buildings in Karlín and whenever its citizens wanted to attend a concert or theater, they would go to Prague, which was just a short trip away. In addition, our servants and the soldiers stationed in Karlín's barracks, as well as workers from Daněk fabric shop, in Perie (a town also near Prague) often visited the Capital for their cultural activities.

Even in its seemingly sleepy state, Karlín was in some ways more progressive than Prague. It had the first electric-lighted road, and the streets were lighted with Křížík's arched lamps. The Křížík factory was also located in Karlín. At the time, the leaders of the Sokol movement had all been trained by Tyrš and included men such as Scheiner, Vaníček, and many more. These men were now instructing the third generation of Sokols in regular evening gym classes and still faithfully following the Tyrš system of exercise. New instructors were required to receive specialized instructor training of assuring complete adherence to the Tyrš principles. This loyalty to the Tyrš system and his directions for leaders was the basis of Sokol's success, which manifested itself in the twentieth century. It should be known that the Tyrš ideals and guidance were not allowed to stagnate. Many aspects of training were extended through the introduction of new exercises such as fencing, as taught in the French schools of that day. Throughout this period, the Tyrš objective to unite all Sokols under one organization remained paramount and was meeting with some success in all areas.

**EDITORIAL COMMENT.** Two Sokol leaders who played prominent roles for many years after the death of Miroslav Tyrš were Physical Director, Jindřich (Jindra) Vaníček and President Josef Scheiner. Their names repeatedly appear in *To byl Sokol*. Josef Schneider, who was trained by Tyrš, became his successor; he was elected president of ČOS in 1906 and was an important supporter of future Czechoslovak president Masaryk's promotion of the legionnaires (Czech and Slovak patriots who joined the Allies in World War I). It was the legionnaires who played

a critical role in the formation of Czechoslovakia in 1918. Vaníček played a major role in Sokol's development of gymnastics and physical training.

At the turn of the century, sports were in their ascendancy and Sokol was destined to play a major role. The first track and field competition held in Bohemia was organized by the Sokol in Kolín. The first rules of basketball were written and published by Joseph Klinka; and then ČOS (Česká Obec Sokolská, or Czech Union Sokol) published their rules for organizing and directing cycling in Sokol. At this time, Sokol also participated in international gymnastics competition, as early as 1889, when they competed in France. This activity was originally forbidden by the Austrian vice-regent, but the president of ČOS answered: "Excellency, we are still going." At the competition, Sokol teams won the first three team prizes in gymnastics.

By the end of the 19th century, Sokol was a member of the European Union of Gymnastic Associations. Additionally, for its own units, Sokol published a *Věstník* (Herald, Bulletin), which established the high standards for instructor staffs and the rules for the compulsory practices by units and instructors. It further delineated the strict rules for acceptance of new members. A waiting period by candidates for membership was maintained and no individual was accepted as a legal member until this provision was met. One of the crucial problems of the day was the female question. How were women to be treated? After overcoming initial resistance and especially after the breakthrough at Prague's Sokol Vyšehrad, the acceptance of women as full members of Sokol gained strength. Many new female organizations were formed. It was also at this time that ČOS issued directions for all units which established the divisions for junior girls and women as self-governing entities. However, this existed mostly on paper. While women could meet and recommend specific actions, all program approvals were accomplished by a committee of the unit on which women had no voice. They were, however, represented by one of the Sokol brothers at the board meetings.

Sokol now existed in most parts of what was to become Czechoslovakia, except in Slovakia. All attempts to form units in that area were immediately squashed by the Hungarian authorities. (**Editorial note.** Sokol

in Slovakia did not exist until the after the formation of Czechoslovakia in 1918.) At the beginning of the century, Sokol had 47,418 members of which 9,806 were active and participated in regular classes. In addition, there were 7,350 juniors, small boys and girls. I was a member of the small girl's class at Sokol Karlín which, together with our schools and families, were participants in the growing Sokol movement. At this time, because radio had not yet been invented, the only means of communication were the daily news and the evening meetings of men at the local beer tavern where they gathered for their daily glass of beer. When the men returned home,

they reported the daily Sokol news and the activities of the authorities who opposed the advancement of Czech studies in Germanized territories and in Vienna. To organize the necessary Czech schools, many organizations, such as the Kaminsky Society in Vienna, were formed. Naturally, monetary support was required, so small jars for loose change were placed in taverns and other meeting places and Sokol children were encouraged to collect stamps, tinfoil and other items which could be converted into funds. I remember we children held contests to see who could save the largest tinfoil ball. Such was the look of Sokol at the turn of the century.



Medals awarded Czech Sokol gymnasts in a competition in France.



1901 IV Slet, the first to include women.



## THE BEGINING OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY 1900–1918

### GYMNAStic CLUB OF LADIES AND GIRLS OF PRAGUE

I did not stay very long at Sokol Karlín. When I completed my studies in elementary school, I applied for enrollment at the first girl's academy in Austria named Minerva. Although I had faultlessly completed my entrance examinations, I was not accepted because of all the applicants, I was the youngest. Therefore, I had to attend a Junior High School for one year and finally, at the age of 11, I was accepted into Minerva. We did not have physical education as a subject at Minerva. But the school's physician, Dr. Anna Honzáková, one of the first female Czech physicians, emphatically suggested we attend Sokol for our physical wellbeing. Since all higher classes at Minerva were already members of Sokol teams in the *Gymnastic Society of Ladies and Girls of Prague*, our class joined through mass application.

The Prague Society was in a modern building which was far more elaborate and extensive than any of the Sokol Halls with which we were acquainted. The Hall was two stories high and included a climbing rope which had a basket at the top. The basket could be used for either resting or hiding. In a gallery adjacent to the hall were helmets and pads for fencing. Unheard of at the time were men's locker rooms with shower facilities and a crosswalk extending from the locker room directly to the hall. The crosswalk was used by the gymnasts, so they did not have to walk on the street-shoe polluted areas in their gym shoes. The modern design of this gym hall is evidence of how far ahead of their time were Tyrš and Fügner regarding hygienic concerns in their gym halls.

Into this gym hall built for ladies and girls, we came as children, lived through our first student years as novices and slowly grew into young ladies where we started

our independent thinking, by seeking and asking. There were Sokol ladies on which we looked with much veneration, such as authors, doctors and some of our professors. These ladies lectured us on events of the day and questioned us concerning our likes and dislikes. We were encouraged to express our thoughts and to discuss the society's concerns.

I remember one time voting for our senior ladies' instructor. My classmates and I supported a young, gentle candidate named Pornicka (Tony) Pelikánová who seemed to us the very embodiment of Sokol ideals. We 14-year-old juniors lined up behind her in a war-like group to convince the older ladies that she would be the best director. Her opponent was an older and quite ordinary woman without considerable skill as a gymnast and prone to wearing mixed articles of clothing, such as striped stockings with wild colors. Despite our brave efforts, the odds were against us, and we lost the fight. Soon thereafter, Tony departed for Russia to teach physical education, and while there, she married a brother Sokol colleague by the name of Steiner. Years later, after World War I, she returned to the fold in Prague. When I look back at these events, after the many years that have passed, I am still convinced we students were correct in our choice of candidate.

As I grew older, I found my interests turning more and more to outdoor sports with swimming and skating taking front stage. Additionally, our cultural schedule was increasing, and more time was now being spent attending concerts and the theater. My school subjects were also taking more time, as items such as piano practice, German language studies and sewing filled my available hours. I now found it necessary to evaluate the time I spent on my Sokol activities. I did some cal-

culating and found it took two hours to travel to Sokol in Prague while the Sokol in Karlín was just around the corner. So, I returned to Karlín. Much to my surprise, I found that many changes were made since I first started in Sokol before the turn of the century.

### **BACK TO KARLÍN — 1907 V SLET**

When I returned to Karlín Sokol, I was not yet sixteen. There were no female junior level classes, so we were forced to train with the small girls if our teen-age psyche would allow us to handle the situation. But there were many of us, so the title of small girls did not trouble us too much. Boys did not face a similar problem, for when a boy reached 14 years old, he was accepted as a member of the men's division. The women's division director (Kovářík) asked me if I had trained before, and after my affirmative response, he scheduled me for an examination for entry into the women's third team.

The examination results would be based on the condition that he could re-assign me to the small girl's class if he was not satisfied with my performance. In all units at that time, following the regular gym classes, there were regular instructor clinics held for qualified personnel. As small girls, we were not allowed to linger in the hall after our classes, but, of course, we secretly watched to see what occurred. Imagine our enthusiasm for Sokol as we watched the magic of apparatus work and the charm of gymnastics which was beyond anything we had deemed possible.

In Karlín Sokol and elsewhere, the classes were accessible to the public for viewing from the gallery or from parts of the gym floor. Because of my old habit of secretly watching the older Sokols perform, one evening I was crouched in a corner where I could not be seen, but still intently watching the performances on the parallel bars. There must have been a bright light blazing from my eyes, for after a few moments, an instructor whispered something to another one, who in turn approached me with an invitation to join the group performing on the bars. My knees trembled as I made my way to the apparatus and was persuaded by the instructor to try various exercises on the apparatus. I continued to try the other equipment for the remainder of the gym period. I can still remember it was on a Tuesday when I had my first taste of apparatus work, and I could hardly contain myself waiting for the next class on the following Thursday.

As I approached my class on Thursday, I was stopped by the instructor who informed me that at the instructor's meeting held after the class on Tuesday, the board voted to approve my admittance to the third team of women. I was to start on the horizontal bar and learn such movements as hip circles, and other such skills. It was the praiseworthy custom in those days that each gymnast was required to identify the movement by its proper name before being allowed to perform the exercise. This practice stood me in good stead for many years. By hearing the name of the skill repeatedly, we soon learned the proper terminology for the movement. The lowest team of women consisted of the weakest and mostly overweight gymnasts. Imagine my surprise when I was required to teach them the very movements I had only recently learned. I remember I had to physically assist them to get them onto the apparatus, then man-handle them as we practiced the movement. At the end of the training period, I was tired to the depth of my bones.

In addition to the many deficiencies found in the instructor clinics and twenty years after the death of the Sokol system founder, some bad examples of German type physical training became popular in some of our clubs. Many arguments occurred between defenders of the methodical movements taught by the Sokol system and the new techniques advocated by some of the newer instructors. Tyrš called this controversy a struggle between education and learning. I'm sorry to say that some of the units held with the German explanation and procedures for teaching gymnastics.

Besides my assignment as a teacher of the third team, I was also given the responsibility of teaching a small girl's class. I have spent many hours trying to remember some of the skills that I taught my classes at Sokol Karlín, but time has removed these memories. I do remember I was very anxious to learn more and more, so I sought help from some of the literature available at the time. By chance, I obtained a copy of a Sokol magazine in which appeared an article containing Tyrš' "Foundations of Physical Culture." This article proved to contain a well-spring of information. Between the article and advice given to me by leaders of other girl's teams, I learned many things. I threw myself into the task of learning and teaching new things. The other instructors and I then tried new movements and techniques. In some of these skills, we were successful and in others we failed.

But, overall, we made progress. I remember how we deliberated over how we could swing sideways on the rings when there was a column in the way and then suddenly realizing there was the possibility of making a turn during the swing to enable us to complete the movement.

The Sokol Districts conducted schools for female gym instructor assistants by very senior male instructors. Unfortunately, at that time, our young men were either in the army or else not available for other reasons. So, veteran Sokols such as Bohumil Hanel and Mister Stepanek, a retired miller from Moravia, stepped in and dedicated their time as Sokol instructors.

In those days we were also taught to compose our own calisthenics and combine the movements with popular Sokol or national songs. We used these drills as a way of cooling down our students after a strenuous gym period. Later, the same procedure was used by some of our famous composers such as Bergerová and many others.

When the district school ended, we began our preparations for the 1907 V Sokol Slet. For the major mass women's number, a routine using Indian clubs was selected. Indian clubs were introduced by American Sokols as an exercise for men. Not only were Indian club movements very suitable for glides and circle movements, but the movements could be easily integrated with the music. After their initial introduction as a form of exercise, Indian clubs became a favorite of the women. The clubs used in those days were not the beautiful, light slender clubs of today, but rather more like a cudgel which was rough, short, fat and heavy. And how heavy they were! After exercising with them for a time, we lost the feeling in our arms, but the exercising had to go on. I was particularly affected as I was assigned the responsibility of teaching those individuals who were slow in learning the drill and those who had missed periods of instruction. This required many hours of additional teaching. Even this exercise was very different from the way Indian club movements are performed today where the entire body movement is integrated with the club movements. In those days, it was forbidden to move any part of the body or eyes except the arms and shoulders when performing the circle movements.

In the year of 1907, when I had not yet reached my 17th birthday, I was assigned the leadership role for all women in the Karlín Sokol. I am not sure why I was selected. Maybe it was because I maintained the best discipline of

my gym teams. It must be remembered that I was only an apprentice instructor at this time. However, I did take very seriously all Sokol regulations, requirements, assignments and commandments. So, possibly, my sincerity and dedication rubbed off on the other gymnasts.

Our main work during this period was to prepare for the 1907 Slet. Men were the leaders who had the full responsibility to determine how we would prepare and what would be taught. They selected the drills we would use and developed the procedures we would use in learning our portions. In our unit, Br. Franta Erben, who was famous for his strict approach to discipline, was our leader. The other Slet leader was Jindra (Jindřich) Vaníček. The women instructor's sole responsibility was to assure all participants were present, that they arrived on the drill field on time, in the proper order, and that discipline was maintained during the rehearsal period. Because overall discipline was good, our task was not as difficult as it would become in later years.

I remember, at the 1907 Slet, as we began forming our mass number, a violent electrical storm and cloud burst descended upon us. Even though we were still in the vicinity of our dressing rooms, no one broke ranks, and we stood like rocks in the heavy rain. The senior instructor, realizing we could not perform in this weather because we could not hear the music, ordered us to disperse. We still stood like rocks because we could not hear the command. Finally, he sent assistant instructors through our ranks to relay the message and we soon scattered to nearby shelters. Meanwhile, the audience in the stands reacted less valiantly by quickly making their way toward the exits at the first impact of the heavy rain. In view of the large crowd racing toward the exits and the heavy rains and lightning striking in the vicinity, the seeds of a full blown panic were certainly present. But, because of the example of the junior girls standing like rocks during the cloud burst, the panic was averted, and the people departed without incident. The entire incident was later described by a French reporter in a very flattering report published in a Prague newspaper. The reporter admitted that when the cloud-burst hit, his every thought was to escape as soon as possible. But when he saw those young girls standing on the field without moving, he felt ashamed and remained where he was. His example was followed by many others who stayed in the stands until after the girls had departed, still in their proper forma-

tion. When we departed the field, we headed for our dressing rooms. The rooms had been hastily erected with gaps between the boards, so when we entered the rooms, we discovered our street clothes were as wet and dirty as our uniforms. We were able to rinse the mud from our gym shoes in the water troughs which were built for our washing needs. While the shoes were still wet, we covered them with our gym uniforms and headed home to mother. I must admit that we were a soggy looking group, and we were embarrassed to be seen on the streets of Prague. Imagine our surprise when the people of Prague greeted us with smiles and praises for our valiant efforts. We were truly heroines for the day. Of course, this was not true with our mothers, for when I gave my mother the bundle of wet clothes, she nearly fainted. In their dirty condition, you could not see the parts that were once white.

Mother immediately started to wash, dry and iron the uniform, for by the next morning, the uniform would once again be needed. We discussed the many other gymnasts who were quartered in schools and private homes who also faced the need for clean uniforms by the following day. We should not have worried, for the ladies of Prague rose to the challenge and acting as mothers to the girls, gathered the dirty clothing and returned them the following morning in spotless condition. In the morning, we were once again as clean and fresh as young flowers. When we entered the stadium for our club drill, the audience greeted the 2,000 young girls with stormy applause for their fine display of discipline the previous day.

The 1907 Slet V was the first Slet I attended. For the first time I was conscious of the greatness of the Sokol Organization. I was staggered when I discovered how many thousands of individuals participated, and by the 2,000 young women who had performed with the clubs. We were all very young and could not imagine the daring displayed by the young married ladies performing in public wearing short pants. For the first time, I saw the beautiful Moravian costumes and was deeply impressed with their splendor as well as the beauty of the native dances. At the time, we also learned that a team of Sokol men, while competing for the first time as members of the European Gymnastics Union, had captured first place for the all-around team competition. This great success and victory was a great awakening for all, and we were unusually proud to be members of this wonderful Sokol organization.

## MARRIAGE AND STUDY

In the following year, my entire life changed. It was after I had completed my sixth year of physical training instruction and very shortly before the end of the school year that I became seriously ill with an acute inflammation of the middle ear, which soon developed into a benign tumor. My parents were afraid to consent to an operation because a well-known industrialist had recently died from the same affliction. I was instead forced to submit to an alternate slow method of cure which lasted through my entire school vacation period and did not require surgery. During this period, I was required to lie as still as possible as each move, every spoken word and every swallow caused excruciating pain. By the time I was finally released from my treatment, I had lost so much weight and was in such a weakened condition, that the popular view held in the Karlín community was that I had been stricken with tuberculosis.

Following my recovery, I was prohibited by my family physician, Dr. Krejci, from all physical activities. This decision was supported by the Tyrš Board of Instructors who were very knowledgeable in this area. At this time a new element entered my life. I fell in love. My betrothed began pressuring me for a quick marriage. But under the circumstances, this course of action was not possible. Finally, after another year and a half, we were married, with the stipulation that instead of a honeymoon, we would settle somewhere outside of a city where there was good clean air, healthy, readily available food, and a site located in peaceful surroundings where I could continue my convalescence.

When I was younger and with my family for summer vacations, we used to drive to Hlubočepy v Příbram, southwest of Prague. We now came to this area to take the Kleměna Hanušová cure. (**Editorial note.** Kleměna Hanušová was a student of Tyrš, who developed a system of orthopedic exercises for girls). Unlike other areas, this area of the country was very poor. I remained in the area for four months, and upon my departure, was fully cured, so the treatment was effective.

Now a new factor came into my life. My daughter, Alenka, arrived a little bit early and a little too feeble. For the first year she suffered with frequent attacks of bronchitis, a weakness that was to haunt her for the next ten years.

For the first two years after my daughter's arrival, I was not separated from her except for brief visits to my dentist. It was during this same two-year period that I realized my marriage was a mistake and the premature ending of my education was also an error. I did not consider divorce at the time because of my daughter. But I did feel a strong need for financial security and independence.

To qualify for college entrance, I needed two more years of classic physical education and a final examination. I was fearful of attempting a four-year study program with the rearing of a small child. Fortunately, a well-known friend of a fellow student, Dr. Karel Weigner, had a full understanding of my situation and he advised me to finish my studies privately. He further suggested that I seek advice from the director of my former school to see if continuing my education would be advisable. He felt my most difficult task would be to complete my final examinations. When I spoke to the Director of Minerva, Dr. Hofmeister, without a long explanation, he gave me a book on Greek History and, in a gruff voice, said, "READ".

I read the first page and then started my translation. But the Director stopped me. "That's enough. Since you have not forgotten how to read Greek after five years and you are daring to translate, it is evident that you have not forgotten very much, so I will authorize you to complete the missing two years of classes." I didn't tell him I hoped to complete them in one year.

The purpose of a final examination is to test your knowledge of subjects taught in the 11th and 12th years of schooling and to confirm your understanding of mathematics, Greek and religion. I understood the purpose of mathematics and Greek and felt that religion could be learned from a book. But the friendly and willing catechist from the Minerva School really wanted to teach the subjects to me. He would very deliberately read to me for an hour as though he was in a classroom full of students and then declare, "Learn this by our next class and we will continue this procedure each week." To me, that was not too timely for me, as time was my biggest problem. I felt the best procedure would be to memorize not only that day's lesson, but also to memorize twice the requirement. I discussed this procedure with Mr. Catechist, and he accepted the change with satisfaction. Under the new system, the number of lessons were greatly reduced.

I was still not satisfied that my education was pro-

ceeding fast enough, so I sought permission to attend lectures and physical training classes at the institute for educating teachers of gymnasts attending middle schools and teacher's institutes. Professor Weigner objected to this plan because the institute is part of the university system and he felt they would not be able to accept me as a student until after I had passed my final examination. He suggested I obtain the consent of all the professors involved and even then, he was not sure that I would receive credit for my efforts. I received permission to attend the classes and thereby completed three years of education in one, which was my last two years of high school and my first year at the institute.

**EDITORIAL COMMENT.** Karel Weigner (1874-1937) was a physician, and Professor and Head of Anatomy at the Prague Anatomical Institute, who specialized in topographical anatomy, kinesiology and anthropology. His responsibilities included curriculum innovations for physical education.

On July 26, 1914, WWI began just before I was to take my final examination. My graduation was further delayed because of an injury to my right arm which prevented me from writing. Finally, in September, I completed the examination and became eligible to enter the University Institute and pursue studies normally lasting two years. I already had behind me the year of work in the first-year classes, but was told they could not be counted because I had attended the classes before my graduation from High School. But the war effort now made it necessary for me to further expedite my education objective. I went to Professor Weigner, who was impressed by my stubborn efforts to correct my previous mistakes, and he advised me to formally apply for recognition of my institute attendance. To apply for recognition, he suggested I acquire a representative to intervene on my behalf with the Ministry of Schools in Vienna. "Do you know anyone who would do this for you?" he asked. Undecided as to who I would ask, I winked. I did know Professor Masaryk who used to wait for his daughter, Olga, during classes near the Church of St. Stephen. I did not know it, but at that time, he had many concerns other than mine. I wrote to Olga and her father promised to say some good words on my behalf if, my request was just. I asked for an exception to the regulation, but the request was denied.

Professor Weigner shared my disappointment. He

said: "I advised you to ask a representative to intervene on your behalf. I explained that I asked Professor Masaryk (future president of Czechoslovakia) and Weigner told me that no one else would have been worse. Of course my mistake was one of political innocence, so he then advised me to ask to contact a representative from my voting district.

I was advised to ask Dr. Lokaj, my representative, to find an influential intercessor and then file a new application. But this time I should ask for admittance into the second-year class because I had completed my first-year requirements.

Dr. Lokaj put me into contact with the right man whose name I regret to say is forgotten. One day, Professor Weigner called me to the door of my lecture hall and said, "Gracious lady. We have heard from the University Director that your request has been approved." Finally, I was credited with the three years of education to include the one year of University studies. At this high point of my life, I learned that my husband was called to arms in World War I.

My joy over my scholastic accomplishments did not last very long. The Ministry of Schools published an edict that young men that were able to study physical education are also able to fight for their Emperor in war and, therefore, were needed in the army. The authority for educating professors of physical education was rescinded, and the institute was closed. The fact that women had also been studying at the institute was disregarded because the authorities had no interest in women's concerns. With a deep sense of grief, we laid down our literature on physical training and, henceforth, dedicated ourselves to our secondary educational goals. For me it became a study of languages with French and Russian my major efforts. The Russians now occupied the Carpathian Mountains. The study of languages was to last for four years.

Once again, the wheel of fortune turned when all of us had given up hope of continuing with our original education goal. At Easter, 1915, a few of our male colleagues returned from military service because of injuries. They immediately submitted applications to take the state final examinations since through no fault of their own, they were unable to finish their studies. We women joined with the men in applying for this privilege.

When we received the approval to take the exam-

inations, there was very little time left in which to prepare. The Teachers Institute, located on Panska Street in Prague, loaned us their gymnasium for use in training for the examinations. For me, it was not necessary, as I had had previous higher training in my younger years which consisted of skills more difficult than the Teacher's Institute required. However, in the absence of professors, to assist my colleagues, I offered my advice and assistance. During this period, I attended the exercise periods faithfully and diligently reviewed my lecture notes. Additionally, I studied with a colleague living near me and loaned her my lecture notes. When she did not return the notes to me, it was clear she did not intend to do so. I was forced to sharply strike her before she admitted her decision not to return them.

In our group we had one colleague who was totally incapable of performing the moves on the apparatus. She developed a plan on how to pass the state examination. She would file a protest that the performances demanded on the examination were unsuitable for women. Because I trained all my colleagues on the apparatus, she knew the protest would be in vain if I were allowed to perform. So, her only hope for rescue would be if I failed the theoretical subjects. She believed the trial commission would not let me, as the most skilled instructor, fail due to ignorance in theory and would, thereby, forgive the students who could not qualify in the skills areas. This argument was a very naive approach, and it did affect some of my colleagues who had received my instruction. I felt the situation had gone far enough, so I compelled my colleague to return my lecture notes and books and I concentrated on preparing myself for the examination. While I still dreaded the thought of being asked a question which I could not answer, I was determined to complete the examination and get on with my life and earn a living. My determination to succeed now took precedence over all other activities. My parents also helped as they offered the hospitality of their home to my daughter and me while my husband was in military service.

Because the most difficult subject for me was anatomy, I studied the subject at the anatomy institute. While there, I met Professor Weigner, who informed me that he was looking forward to my completion of the State examinations. Further, he thought I would be one of the best candidates to complete the examination in many years. First, my determination to complete the exam

was driven by my colleagues' insidious actions and now I had the complete confidence of a professor who had been very kind and helpful to me. Certainly, I felt that I could not fail and, thereby, disappoint this fine man. To enhance my knowledge of anatomy, I began studying the parts of a skeleton with an open book at hand while eating and while walking to my lectures. I would repeat out loud the various parts of the skeleton until they became completely familiar to me. War or no war, my only interest was in obtaining that diploma.

Finally, we assembled in the lecture hall for the examination by Professor Weigner. One by one, we were called into the professor's study. Some of my colleagues returned quite satisfied with their efforts, but others returned otherwise. "What happened?" we would ask. "Who knows about 'blood pressure'?" they asked. Someone mentioned that Provazníková would know, but not until a third person asked about blood pressure, did the group assemble around me while I explained what they wanted to know. My name was then called, and Professor Weigner explained to me that he had asked in vain about blood pressure and would I tell him something about it.

My quest for a diploma was successful for I passed with excellent grades and special praise. I was now required to begin a probationary period of one year under the close supervision of an older professor, Markéta Váchtlová. This developed into a deep and lasting friendship. The probationary period was spent in the village of Minerva.

One year later, in 1916, I was appointed one half time to each at two different schools, one in Minerva and the other to Smichov's Girls High School. The two schools were necessary to count as one year of service toward my retirement. I soon discovered that the students were not the enthusiastic pioneers we experienced ten years ago. Cutting short their efforts and studies had slowly become a status symbol. A few female students, members of the fifth semester, who were scions of wealthy parents, were very anxious to show their social status to beginner professors. These girls were known for their mischievous behavior. They gave me a rough introduction to a professor's life during the first few weeks of the semester. In answer to the requirement to wear gym clothes, they stated there was no material or shoes because of the war. I solved the problem by first demonstrating an over the

horizontal bar movement and with a notebook in hand, stated, "This cannot be done with high heels, and I am not forcing you or anyone to exercise in heels." After the first insufficient attempts, the shoes came off. Then I demonstrated a straddle (a legs apart move) on the horse which could not be done in a tight skirt. Once again, I stated, "I am not forcing anyone to do this exercise in a skirt." In the end we came to an understanding and two of these students are still my friends. I did not like splitting my time between the two schools and was glad when, after a year, I was assigned full-time to the school in Smichov. The Smichov school did not have its own gym hall, so we were required to use other facilities. One of my duties was to escort the students from school to the gym facility and back again. The duty required me to change my clothes from eight to twelve times a day and this, of course, shorten the instruction portion of the gym period. The need for an assistant became a pressing matter.

The story of how I met my assistant was unusual because she did not arrive to the post in a normal manner. In those days, when Austrian and Hungarian schools began introducing physical training into their school system, they had a shortage of formally educated physical training instructors with full academic qualifications. They turned to Sokol instructors to solve their problem. In Smichov (a section of Prague) they appointed Františka Sprdliková (Fanny), daughter of a well-known local family who was a highly respected and a popular instructor at Sokol Smichov. Upon her appointment, Fanny closed her tailor shop and dedicated her life to a full-time teaching career.

In 1916 when I passed my probationary training, there was an abundance of formally qualified professor level instructors available for assignment to the school systems of the country. This negated the need to continue with academic deficient instructors and presented a problem to the city fathers concerning Fanny. Because she was highly regarded in the school by her superiors and the students, and had always scored highly with her official inspectors, a solution was required be found. The wise city fathers decided they would accept an officially qualified professor and retain Miss Sprdliková as an assistant. For both of us, this solution became a great joy. Not only was this a chance to renew an old friendship, but also gave us the opportunity to work together. As it developed, there was no distinction between her duties

and mine. We shared our instruction requirements and did everything together.

## INTERNAL DEVELOPMENT OF SOKOL

Like other countries, physical training in Bohemia and Moravia was of most interest to men. Dr. Miroslav Tyrš had a high goal for the newly founded Sokol movement. The Sokol aim would be to not only educate the people, but also to provide them with the ability to restore their status as an independent self-governing nation. Instilled in this objective there is no doubt that the word "nation" included women. So, Tyrš prepared for their participation. Tyrš' new movement attracted the interest of prominent female authors who demonstrated their interest by donating a flag. In addition, Tyrš also trained a staff of young women instructors who would, in six years after the founding of Sokol Prague, originate the "Gymnastic Society of Prague's Ladies and Girls".

From the beginning, Tyrš recognized that physical training and leadership for women had to be different than the training designed for men. In the early days of Sokol, there were many women's organizations originating in the various Bohemian cities around the country, but only the one in Prague persevered. It proved that the need for women leaders and women's organizations was initially greater than the available women qualified to fill the positions.

The fifth All-Sokol Congress showed that leadership requirements for the women's department were causing an unbearable burden on male leaders. Despite the previous opposition to women teaching women, the women's classes were rapidly increasing in size. Into the breach stepped several highly admired leaders, such as Anna Ptáková. While women had been participating in physical training since 1898 through an arrangement with the public school system, they were finally included in the Fourth Slet of 1901, where they performed a calisthenics drill. These initial efforts were the basis for developing roles by women leaders and their views and interests were finally presented to the ČOS (Česká Obec Sokolská) leadership by Eliška Roudna, a teacher of gymnastics.

It was agreed that proper women's instructional techniques would be used in all advanced and democratic units where women leaders could push through these reforms. The new concepts were particularly successful in units such as Prague's Vyšehrad where sister Barbara

Sourek successfully obtained the support of Rudolf Bile and the families of Heller and Fučík. Other successes were achieved by sisters in Moravia: in Moravská by Ostrava, later in Frenstat, Radhoštěm, Brno, and Tišnov. These women founders were by no means suffragettes. Instead, through industrious and persistent hard work and help from many brothers, they achieved their objectives. The women's cause was certainly helped when delicate, smiling sister Anna Vodová was selected as the first district directress.

The effort to advance women to full membership in Sokol had been debated in all Sokol assemblies and committees until WWI, when success was finally achieved. Leading up to WWI, women assumed greater and greater influence in the Sokol movement. All changes in women's activities had to be approved by a unity committee. Some of these changes included the new gentle motions of arms and legs and movements from one point on the floor. Finally, the success of the Sixth Sokol Slet in 1912 convinced the governing committee that change was necessary and this led to the 10 May 1914 resolution granting full and equal membership to all women.

The evolution of physical training in the Sokol movement was guided by Dr. Tyrš' instruction to notice and study new directions in the physical training world in foreign countries and accept what agrees with the Sokol program and its aims. The largest physical training event of the time was the International Congress of Physical Education held in 1913 in Paris and attended by brothers Scheiner and Augustin Očenášek. At this conference they encountered many innovations in physical training. Based on this new knowledge, exercise systems for women were developed by Očenášek, who also published numerous articles on gymnastic training. In 1913, women's gymnastics essentially followed the same movements and performed the same exercises as men, even though it was obvious that women were not built to perform the same as men. Often, women did not have sufficient strength to perform the difficult strength movements. At the 1913 Congress, the Sokol brothers encountered Emil Jacques-Dalcroze, a music teacher who was researching how movements could be related to the music in a rhythmical manner. They also encountered a physiologist by the name of George Demeny who held strong views against short brief movements while maintaining tense muscles and advocated circling, flow-

ing motions which were fluent without interruption. Finally, they encountered a man by the name of Hebert who was a scholar of physical training in young men and who warned against a one-sided program for individuals during their time of puberty. Because Tyrš, many years ago, had warned that the exercise program for women and children had to contrast with the program for men, the innovations demonstrated at the Paris Congress were eagerly accepted by the Sokol brothers.

Those new views, supported by scientific research, particularly attracted Br. Očenášek who enthusiastically supported the Dalcroze's lectures and demonstrations conducted in Prague. In the Ziskov Unit that Br. Očenášek had founded, he joined with a remarkable teacher and music composer, Karel Pospisil to further the new gymnastic concept. With Pospisil and Hana Dubová and later Burgerová, they transferred Dalcroze's principles, a statement of motion to music, into a new exercise called rhythmics. This new exercise was further enriched by new composers of music and joint exercises and soon became the new symbol of Sokol practice and use in Sokol Slets. (**Editorial note.** Today rhythmic gymnastics, like artistic gymnastics, is a sport for women).

Tyrš, himself, studied the Swedish gymnastics system and valued many of its concepts, but he also noted many of its deficiencies. One of his first pupils, the leader of the second Slet, Br. Joseph Klenka, went still further and accepted many elements from Swedish training, into the Sokol practice. Exercises on Swedish ladders and jumps over Swedish vaulting boxes became standard components in our Sokol gyms. Jindra Vaníček, after studying in France, introduced fencing with both short and long sticks. Sokols from the US introduced us to exercises with clubs which we accepted at once in ČOS and used by women in the 1901 Slet. Sokol Instructors, guided by the principles of the Tyrš system and accepting the new apparatus and tools, developed the most modern methods of physical exercise. Their approach to gymnastics assured success in carrying out the original Tyrš concepts and directly led to enrichment of the people and the continued acceptance of new ideas and progressive, attractive gymnastics training.

## THE 1912 VI SLET

The sixth (1912) All Sokol Slet in Prague was also at the same time, as the first Slet of the Union of Slavic

Sokols. This Slet, however, was not a showpiece of Sokol unity. The bulk of the Slavic-Sokols were subjects of the Austrian Hungarian Empire who, individually, yearned for liberation. Included in the Slavic Sokols were Bulgarians, then under Turkish rule, Luzices Serbs in Germany, and the Russians. In Russia there were also the Ukrainian Sokols who were irreconcilable with their Russian domination and who entered the Slavic Sokol as a special union. Then there was the greatest tension of all, which was between the Russian and Polish Sokols. Poland was a country that had their territory divided between their three powerful neighbors, Germany, Austria and Russia before WWI. The Russian Sokols claimed they were defending themselves as they did not have sufficient influence to alter the suspicious Czars' authorities who held reign over the non-political Polish units located in the former Polish kingdom.

The Union of Slavic Sokols had a very hard task in moderating the tension between members and to link them, not only regarding their language and Slavic heritage, but also to educate them in their efforts toward democracy and eventual liberation. Despite the union's efforts, the Polish Sokols did not attend the 1912 Slet because of the Russian presence.

The Germans in Austria were concerned by the large numbers of Slavic Sokols. They were fearful of the preponderance of their numbers and by the possibility they would lose their special privileges acquired in Slavic lands where they were in the minority. They provoked the Austrian authorities to be cautious and advertised the Slavic Slet as a treasonable undertaking. The Austrian authorities also tried to suppress the Slet or limit its scope. When Emperor Franz Josef, showed an interest in viewing the Slet, the ČOS board responded that they were not able to take responsibility for his safety. Despite many orders to the contrary, the Austrian flag was not displayed nor was the Austrian National hymn played. In Prague, the School Board did not allow high school students to participate in pre-Slet celebrations, while at the same time, they allowed high school participation in German activities near the Sokol stadium.

The fraternization of Slavic Sokols drew attention from the world press who were further enriched by the caliber of the music composers and the professionalism of the joint exercises which demonstrated Sokol practice in its best light. They referred to the Sokol move-

ment as a national force that would soon change the map of Europe.

Participating in the Sixth Slet were: 18,000 men; 5,600 women; 1,050 junior boys; 2,097 small boys and 1,980 small girls. The internal development of the women's organization, displayed in this Slet, revealed the success of women's leadership. A board of women's instructors was organized, and Hana Dubová composed calisthenics especially for women. Women were trained and taught by women even though the top leadership was provided by the Director of men, Jindra Vaníček.

Three months after the Sixth Slet, war broke out in the Balkans and the brotherhood displayed at the Slet now became more concrete as both financial and medical aid were provided to the Sokol units involved in the conflict.

The most significant outcome of the Sixth Slet was the readily apparent military overtures of the Sokol movement and the impact it would have on the forthcoming WWI. After this Slet, the Sokols were compared to the battle of Marathon in Athens where a small group of superbly trained soldiers were able to defeat a much larger force.

At this same time, the Czech poet, Domorazek, without any attempt at camouflage, called upon all to fight for liberty and discussed the Sokol wave which was already rolling along and would continue to roll with full support until liberty was achieved. The Sokol halls now responded with patriotic songs written by Karel Pospisil with words by Jaroslav Norman. One of the songs began, "When the day of revenge comes," and ends, "let it be our famous one as the law preached as we conquer our Czech Marathon." In the fall of 1913, Sokol Žižkov arranged a program entitled "Health, Strength and Beauty", which had as its ending composition, a number written by Sokol brothers Domorazek, Pospisil, Očenášek and Pergl, called "Downfall of a Tyrant." This number, with words, music and movements portrayed a victorious revolt of the enslaved. It contained the inflammatory command, "Knock him down!" The Sokols were prepared.

## **PREPARING TO FIGHT**

The twenty-eighth day of October 1918, with its deep meaning to all Czechoslovaks, has not fallen into our laps from heaven. It was prepared for by design and by plans developed by Sokol for over a half century. Tyrš lived through his childhood and mature years in the

exciting atmosphere of a revival movement. This movement had, at the time of his university studies, achieved remarkable success in the fields of philosophy, arts, sciences and economics. Yet he was not satisfied. His glowing patriotism asked for more. He wanted a full national life for his nation and wanted to see it again in the forefront of knowledge, where it had been before. He knew it was a lofty goal with a long path. He was also aware of the many disadvantages that exist with a small nation located in an unfavorable geopolitical position. But he was convinced that a nation's fate is not determined on a battlefield but in the period before the battle. Not one nation of the many that have existed since time began, has ever perished through its own vigor and high values. Rather, those that failed did so through indifference and rejection. Tyrš was convinced that after a sustained period of subjugation, justice and liberation will prevail. He was also convinced that when people are prevented from healthy development and normal progress, a situation is created that is harmful. He founded Sokol with the primary goal to preserve the nation through a renewal of freshness without which other nations have died. He also wanted to achieve a renewal of physical and moral health to prevent the start to national destruction.

In the onset of the Sokol movement, Tyrš believed there could be an accommodation within the political leadership and framework of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He even offered Austria the help of Sokol volunteers in their conflict with Prussia in 1866. But shortly thereafter, he recognized the duplicity of actions within the monarchy which convinced him that freedom would not be easy, and eventually the Czechs would have to fight to achieve their goal. In 1871, Tyrš initiated a Sokol newspaper which contained this leading article: "Our task, direction and Goal." The article concluded with "Weapons in every fist. We must organize for war." These words must be spoken a hundred and even a thousand times. It is also necessary that we have young, strong, spotless men who are willing to defend their nation in time of war and in time of peace, and to be ever watchful against the ever-present human traits that lead to a nation's destruction.

From that time on, Tyrš strengthened the emphasis regarding physical training for military service. He also established the goal of Sokol spiritual and moral education for Sokol recruiting. In an editorial for the Sokol

newspaper, Tyrš wrote that Sokol Gymnastics and the Units must help in the defense of the Country. In a speech at the public training demonstration at Prague Sokol on 2 May 1869 he ended his speech with this challenge: "We, under the Sokol flag, can die for honor, for liberty and for the glory of our nation. But first, we must develop young, strong, spotless men."

He went on to say: "Such youths, men and later, even women, must work to educate Sokols, to revive our national pride, to add quality to our education and thus establish the basis for the obtainment of an independent life. After achieving physical efficiency, we must instill a national consciousness in our people and a will for the national prospective through sacrifices. Tyrš, throughout his entire life, demonstrated the path for such an education. In his everyday activities, he constantly set the example of a proud and unyielding posture toward an unjust ruler. When the Emperor Franz Joseph I honored Prague by a state visit and showed his willingness to accept the homage of the Prague citizens, Sokols journeyed to the city of Kolín to display the flag of their unit.

Tyrš' successors understood his legacy and continued along the path he had opened. With their regular exercise periods, they strengthened not only their bodies and their will to succeed, but also their cooperation and unselfish help to the weak. By training together, they learned respect for others and adapted themselves to the whole. In the great race for excellence in gymnastics, the unit advanced its best competitor to the district to the detriment of their own team. That's how they learned to subordinate the interest of the individual to the interest of the whole and the interest of the lower whole to the interest of the higher, and finally to the national interest. Sokol brotherhood led to mutual honor and support for the united sokol organization which was characterized by common ideals and common good. By reminding the Sokol leaders through creative examples taken from history and the united requirements needed on a national scale, the goal of the organization, liberty for nation and individual independence, was clearly established.

Tyrš' successors also followed his example of authority defiance. In 1889, the Austrian government forbid the Sokols to parade to their Slet site or to invite guests to the second All Sokol Slet. As a result, the Slet organizers (a committee from Sokol Prague) called off the Slet and transferred the gymnastic portion to the town of Česky

Brod. Moreover, in 1889, some Sokols travelled to Paris to compete in gymnastics despite an order by the governor prohibiting such activity. In Paris, because they were prohibited to display their flag, they carried a bouquet of flowers hoisted on a pole dedicated to the Republic of France and to its President Carnot. The spirit of defiance continued as the poster announcing the third Slet, designed by Br. Prusler depicted an athlete tearing off his handcuffs in front of the eyes of a figure symbolizing the native country of Bohemia. The thought behind the poster was understood by Governor Count Thun, who recognized it as Czechs breaking off their shackles.

Sokol authors again and again reminded the brotherhood of their long-range goal of liberty for all. Sokol President Joseph Scheiner strongly supported Tyrš' grand idea that a physical and moral regeneration of the nation was needed and must be achieved in a harmonious and impartial manner. He announced that liberty does not come to nations that are weak or worn out but must be gained by nations through their strength and high moral ideals. He reminded the brotherhood that the fight would be long and hard, but in the end, the winner would be the strong.

The periodic Slets proved to be the strongest tools in teaching patriotism and educating the nation regarding the Sokol mission. Through their individual sacrifices all Sokols were made a part of the entire effort to achieve their goal. Slets were also the measure of a successful Sokol movement. Not only was this achieved by the constant increase in the number of participants, but also through their willing sacrifices of time and effort in the spirit of love and dedication. The power of Slets was not only created by the perfection of their physical performances, but also through the acceptance of the common ideals and objectives of the movement. Sokol leadership did not let any opportunity slip away to remind the brotherhood of the Sokol direction and goal. From 1907, and thereafter, each Slet contained a dramatic scene depicting a patriotic event. The first scene at the Fifth Slet introduced "Žižka's victory over King Zigmund", and the second scene at the Sixth Slet depicted a time in "Athens after the battle at Marathon".

Thus, the Slets were understood by the entire nation. The theme was beautifully expressed by Jan Neruda in a news report. He noted that the nation lining the sidewalks greeted the nation's participants in the parade

and the participants in turn greeted the nationals lining the sidewalks. Even the leaders of the Czech political movement understood the liberation objective of Sokol. Masaryk regularly participated in gym classes, first in Prague and later at the Malá Strana (Lesser Town) Sokol. When the Austrian parliament was in session, Masaryk attended gym classes at Sokol Vienna I. Other members of parliament attended with him. In a book entitled "Bohemian Question," Thomas Masaryk expressed his thoughts to his nation that the way to liberty was identical to the Tyrš way which was: "To create a nation's unity, you must move above partiality, religious and other differences and work together to achieve the goal." The entire political community of that time joined in praising Sokol. This group was joined by the Slovak poets: Svetozár and Hurban who expected Sokol's support of Slovakia. Peter Kompis and Milos Liptovský called on Sokol to help the subjugated Slovaks.

Convinced that their objective of self-determination within the framework of the Austria-Hungary Empire was not possible, Sokol sought support in foreign countries. Again Tyrš' best pupil and communicator, Josef Scheiner communicated the Sokol message to friends and allies throughout the world. He took his message to Černá Hora (Black mountain) and to Bulgaria and, via a network of Sokol gymnastics teachers, the word spread through Russia. The connection was completed when the Federation of Slavic Sokols was created.

Soon, he also understood that Slovaks in America could also provide support in any future struggle, so he hastened to strengthen alliances with them through trips to America and other personal contacts. The answer to the support came about through statements of support from the Slovaks and Czechs in America. It was determined that both would whole heartily support any undertaking by the old country which would enhance the power and glory of its name. Out of all the non-Slav nations, the most receptive to the Sokol message was France, for they looked on the Austria-Hungary empire as a common enemy.

The Slet speeches, which happened during Scheiner's leadership, were events of international significance and were heard and analyzed by all foreign countries. Frenchmen who understood the message best had already at the fourth Slet in 1901 labeled the Sokols as warriors for human rights. Our devoted friend, Sansboeuf, after

the influence of the fourth Slet, declared that this organized Czech strength must win the future. After the Fifth, and more so after the Sixth Slet, the international press described the Sokols as a national army that was better trained and more ready for war than most army forces. The Sokol leaders considered the praise as too boastful, but more valued was the knowledge that the success had been achieved by good will and brotherhood.

## THE FIRST WORLD WAR

The war affected us all. My husband was called into military service in the first months of the war and because he had been an independent contractor, it meant the end of our family income. My parents proposed that my three-year old daughter and I move in with them, so I accepted. This move made it possible for me to return to Sokol.

The war, of course, changed, with one stroke, the whole shape of our lives. We first felt the change in our railroad system. At that time, we used to travel to Vestec near Stará Boleslav (Prague district) by train for our summer vacation. We used the Northwest railway, which was one of the main arteries for transporting troops to the Eastern battlefields. Because of this, civilian travel was limited to two trains weekly, which left in the evening from Prague and returned the following Sunday night. We had to wait a long time without losing hope before we were able to travel to our destination. This was, however, only one of the small inconveniences of the war and only the forerunner of what was to come. The Austrian government, even before the war started, had confiscated, for the army's use, a large part of the harvest, which caused panic among the citizens who quickly emptied the stores and warehouses of the remaining goods. Hoarding of agricultural products quickly gave birth to a black market in these items. For those people who had something to do with manufacturing, where barter was possible, the black market was good. In other areas however, families began trading their laundry, silverware, pictures and even pianos for food, and when these were gone, they tightened their belts. Soon, under nourishment reared its ugly head and everyone began defending what little they had left at the risk of their life.

Because cigarettes were good bartering material, my father stopped smoking. We learned to drink herb tea and even chicory for coffee. Throughout the area around Prague, there was nothing to buy, not even an egg. For

vacations in 1917 and 1918, a colleague of mine found us lodging in Červený Kostelec (red fortified church). Thanks to my advanced graduation, I was now teaching school and had my own income. Soon it was possible to spend an entire day and use a whole day's pay to even find something to buy or barter. At harvest time the field hands were the ones who got the proper food for their own use or to use for bartering purposes. This action left nothing for the general populace.

In 1918 our food situation was desperate. I had rented a beautiful log cabin, so I invited a sister from Karlín's Sokol to share expenses over the summer. A few days before we were to leave for vacation at Kostelac, my husband returned from the war. He was nearly starved, and I found it almost impossible to satisfy his hunger. We were able to obtain some subsistence before the harvest, but then one day it was gone and there was nothing to eat. All four of us set out on long tour searching for food, but all we found were some carrots.

Our last hope of finding food was an old miller near Zernov, who was a big patriot and a reader. He had saved all the issues of the *National News* and owned a respectable sized library. During the past year, my friend, Sophia and I engaged in beautiful conversations with him, and he sold us some much-needed food. Somehow, we stopped visiting him. But now, in our moment of deepest need, I again sought his help. When I knocked, the housewife opened the door and, after a brief hesitation, whispered that I should stay outside. She then closed the door. In a moment she reappeared and brought from under her apron, a one-fourth loaf of bread. She stated that I should leave quickly because the police were searching in the mill.

Those years were very hard. Not even my cousin helped. She was farming on my father's natural farm in Veltěže near Louny (about 30 miles northwest of Prague). Police stopped and searched all road travelers and confiscated even insignificant amounts of food. I had lost fifty pounds. In our six-member family we were barely existing on two officer's salaries. Imagine how bad it was for families with less income.

Families at home awaited, intensely, for mail from their loved ones and when it did not come, then a notice from the Red Cross came stating that the soldier was captured. It was a relief that he was not killed. I received a note from Rose Syrová informing me that Professor

Masaryk was in Russia.

News regarding various happenings was hard to find. A teacher of the French language and a native of France, by the name of Rosenin, had settled in Prague and became a member of Sokol Prague. He received many packages from home in which individual gifts were wrapped in old newspapers. This was a source of information. There was no radio yet and our newspapers were heavily censored. But even so, many rumors were leaked. Eventually, we found out about the fame of the Czech-Slovak Legion fighting throughout foreign countries. They were established on three fronts: Russia, France and Italy.

**EDITORIAL COMMENT.** The Czech-Slovak Legion consisted mostly of soldiers who defected from the Austrian army and joined the allies during World War I. Their bravery and long journey through Siberia earned them international respect and was a factor in the formation of Czechoslovakia. Sokol training and leadership was a major factor in the legionnaire's success.

The entire nation was of one heart. In the spring of 1918 hunger was the dominant force and desperate mothers who had nothing to feed their children were in a rage. There were cases when police shot into the starving mobs in an attempt to maintain order. At that time, all types of female organizations, regardless of political persuasion, did their best to placate the hungry women and convince them not to risk their lives in these last days of the war. There were lecturers concerning food nourishment and we taught the women how to find valuable mushrooms as well as sources of vitamins in herbs and wild vegetables. Our efforts would not have helped had it not been for the patriot flame burning in their Czech hearts. The widow of the founder of Sokol, Mrs. Renata Tyršová, took the lead in the crusade to find food for the children. Together with Růžena Svobodová, they convinced the nation not to let the children die from malnourishment. First, they appealed to the farmers to accept the children during vacation as their guests. Then they turned to manufacturers and clothiers for their assistance.

This liberal organization of women soon became known as the "Bohemian Hearts." They, together with the Sokol President Scheiner, and Vladimír Procházka, and Professor Groh, the thousands of Sokols and non-Sokols and the whole nation attacked the food problem.

The Sokol units took it upon themselves to search out the needy, however modest they were. The confidence in the “Bohemian Heart” was not misplaced. When at the Ninth Sokol Slet, I looked at the suntanned junior boys in their short gym pants (the boys’ leader wanted to show the world their shapely bodies), and I realized these were precisely the four classes born in the four years of war who had been so endangered by the war’s poverty but rescued by “Bohemian Hearts.”

### **SOKOL DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR**

Before I discuss Sokol activities during the war it is necessary I remind you that the Sokol of 1914 was far different than the Sokol of 1862. Fifty-two years had seen many changes in society and of course, also in Sokol. What had not changed were the Sokol ideals. It was the physical and mental exercises and the physical and moral condition of the people which led to the realization of the overall goal of independence for the nation. Throughout the entire world as well as in our country, there was a general awakening of women with a conscious desire to fully participate in national affairs and in the Sokol movement which had initially been established as a male organization. Tyrš was the first who understood that to reach independence it was not enough to have weapons and strength, but it was also necessary to have the intellectual will and moral strength of the entire nation, including the women. In physical training, he discovered a meaningful environment for such education. The first step for the women was to establish a women’s physical training association like Sokol.

I have previously mentioned the growth of the women’s organization. By 1913 more than ten thousand women were participating in Sokol life, but the granting of full and valid membership into Sokol stopped with the start of the war. Most men still saw the role of Sokol as a national army with the culmination of their efforts resulting in a military engagement with Austria. There was no place for women in such a scenario. The women, however, stood with the Tyrš viewpoint, which saw the main Sokol task to not only be the national education for defense of the nation, but also the improvement of the people’s physical, spiritual and moral values, which included women as well as men. With their physical activity, women were proving they were able to rise, even to leadership roles, in accomplishing the edu-

cation objectives. Gradually some of the men began seeing the women’s viewpoint and finally, through a vote of 318 to 261, the presidency of Sokol was given detailed instructions concerning the elevation of women to full membership. This action was just in time, because two months later, we were at war.

The development of ČOS (Czech Union of Sokols), despite the initial closure to women, was exceptional. Sokol consisted of 38 districts with 1,180 units (clubs) plus 97 self-governing female sections. Membership consisted of 106,158 men and 21,939 women. Under the guidance of Sokol President Joseph Scheiner and Physical Director Jindra Vaníček, Sokol developed into a strong, resolute group dedicated to victory in the expected struggle for national liberty. At a central committee meeting held 29-31 May 1914, extensive Sokol international participation and recognition came to fruition with Sokol representation on the Olympic committee. At this meeting, attended by many highly educated men, including physicians, ČOS was able display the values of a Sokol education.

Confidence in Sokol as a national force, became more prevalent with time and was displayed in many ways. Despite the prohibition of public celebrations, Prague’s sisters placed flowers on the Hus monument. Throughout the whole land, people planted trees and laid boulders to pay tribute to Hus as a heroic fighter for national rights. To honor the forthcoming 30th anniversary of Tyrš’ death, the Sokol president ordered the sculptor, Kavka to design a bronze memorial tablet with an enlarged relief of Tyrš. This tablet was to be fastened to a rock across from the site where his body was found. However, this masterpiece, which bore a beautiful resemblance to the Sokol founder, was never installed because the authorities feared the rock would crumble and the tablet would fall on tourists who used the trail under the rock. Years later, the tablet was placed in the courtyard of the Tyrš House. However, during the WWII German occupation, the tablet was melted for use in Nazi weapons.

To coincide with the 30th anniversary celebration of Tyrš’ death, a Slet in suburban Brno was held on 28 June 1914. However, following the women’s number, the Slet was interrupted when news was received of the assassination attempt in Sarajevo.

**EDITORIAL COMMENT.** The assassination of Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife occurred in

Sarajevo, Bosnia (a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Because the assassin was a Serbian-nationalist, Austria and Hungary declared war on Serbia. However, due to the many alliances between European countries (Russia and Serbia; France and Russia; Britain, France and Belgium), these countries became allies, whereas Austria and Hungary were joined by Germany. Later the US and Italy joined the allies. Since Bohemia and Moravia were part of Austria, their men were drafted into the Austrian army.

Mobilization became a priority on the training fields because within the first year of war, over fifty thousand Sokols joined the army. This number was almost half of all Sokol male members. The Sokol president issued a written request calling on all members to give brotherly help to the needy wherever such need was found and to form committees to continue the aid program. The meetings of the Sokol board were held daily because of the numerous needs for aid. Furthermore, there was no certainty that it would be possible to call a meeting of the central committee, thus the board demanded a power of attorney to manage the Sokol wealth and to economize within the boundaries of the previous budget. Its priority was to secure all property in the event the authorities would attempt to dissolve the Sokol organization.

The board changed the identity of the Sokol museum to a museum for the preservation of physical culture to which they entrusted the valuable keepsakes and to which they delivered all properties and museum funds. Out of the assets of Sokol, which exceeded one million crowns, 816,580 crowns were transferred to the City of Prague Insurance Company in payment for a contract to insure all Sokol members against injury. Of this amount, 48,138 crowns were earmarked for the purchase of artificial limbs and rehabilitation training of brothers injured in the war. The remainder of the funds were entrusted to the members of the board with full dispersal authority. In this way it was possible to pay rents, pay salaries, support the foreign activities of Professor Masaryk, and to support the families of imprisoned brothers. Finally, once the revolution was successful, the funds were to pay for the resumption of operational activities. Thanks to this wise process, only 44,787 crowns fell into the hands of the authorities when ČOS was dissolved. This amount was returned to the museum curator by the authorities after a full investigation. After the war and at the first meeting of the ČOS, a complete and clear account of all

funds and property was made.

At this first meeting of the board, a resolution was made to donate one-half million crowns to the orphans of legionnaire brothers who were killed. The amount deposited with the City of Prague Insurance Company became the foundation of the post-war accident policy for ČOS.

At the start of the war, ČOS recommended to all units that they change all Sokol halls into Lazarettes (a form of hospital) under their own management so they would be safe from confiscation. By this action they lost their gymnasiums, but they were willingly replaced by the school system gym floors. Sokols were still able to use their own assembly rooms, libraries and other facilities throughout the war. An additional benefit from this precaution was that the injured, coming directly from the various battle fields, were able to bring with them the factual news, which differed from the official published versions. The true news contributed to their being able to maintain faith in the eventual victory, freedom and strength in overcoming the restrictions brought about by the war. ČOS Headquarters by itself established five Lazarettes and the various units changed 23 gymnasiums into Lazarettes. This action provided 10,000 beds, and Sokol equipped some with separate rooms for medical instruments and some for use by the doctors and nurses. The personnel were mostly Sokol sisters who were trained through special courses.

With financial matters now under control and with a special commission established to handle the medical support area, the board turned its attention inward to the primary activities of Sokol which began assuming new importance. The Federation of Slavic Sokols was not able to remain active during the war, so it was abolished in August 1914 to take the wind out of the sails of the police who were always looking for any excuse to intervene into the private affairs of Sokol. The board now devoted itself to maintaining the spirit and resolution to work within Tyrš' intentions and lead the nation to the final victory.

From the start of the war and onward, the ČOS sent out appeals to the units to continue their training activities and to use their influence to encourage all within their area of contact. In instances where the active members of the unit left for military duties, the older brothers stepped into the void and took the responsibility of maintaining the unit. Women were asked to lead the

small boys in their training. The way in which the challenge was met by the units impressed the nation and demonstrated that Sokol was a source of strength in accomplishing the necessary tasks.

Women did more than what was required of them. In many units, they not only trained the young boys, but they also trained junior boys and some men. When the state forbade some Sokol activities, Sokol wives stepped into the breach and through their votes and other activities, influenced official acts. Some sisters, such as the district instructor sister Anna Drbalová in Tesnov was jailed for her activities; her duties were assumed by a gentle, non-suffragette, who led the entire district. Women took upon themselves the responsibility for the education and the needs of Sokol families.

In Karlín, where I spent the entire war, we had quite a large unit and even after mobilization, some men remained. Our governing committee had a few city employees who were exempt from military duty. Although equality of men and women was accepted by the board, these provisions were never enforced except in extraordinary situations brought about by the war. The women of Sokol still had self-government, but we also had a coordinator who attended our meetings and then reported our activities to the central committee. The committee welcomed our cooperation and we acknowledged that during the war there were things more important than our female rights. More important was the harmony between instructional boards. During this period, Br. Vespar was the leader of the board of women. He was an intelligent metal worker who acknowledged my background in teaching gymnastic skills. Once he told me, "Why is it that I cannot teach women to side vault over the horse with the hip passing closest to the horse. They are skillful in everything else, but the vaults go nowhere." I explained to him that we have different figures than men and how our anatomy influences our performing side vaults. Thereafter, he stopped torturing himself by no longer attempting to teach the movement. When Br. Vespar joined the military, the Sokol in Prague sent an instructor to assume the leadership duties of the instructor's board.

The curse of war, common to all, brought us all together as one large family. Each of us had someone in the army and we shared tracking their fate and providing a storehouse of information for all. Together, we vis-

ited various Sokol units. We were never again so close with the sisters as we were during the war. Our group also founded a women's singing circle, which sometimes helped Professor Widerman in his choir activities. Other activities included excursions to historical sites and conducted literary sessions. We prepared preliminary readings and explanations and often combined these activities with our visits to the other units. Later, when the police increased their vigilance of Sokol activities, we began meeting in the great outdoors. The instructors from our unit in Červený Kostelec did not understand our motives behind the meetings, but the meetings were now becoming so popular that half the city's population came to our campfire. It now looked like a public assembly, conducted without permission of the authorities, and we could not be sure that between the hosts and the people, there were not some jealous individuals who had the ear of a person in authority. I did not dare present my prepared speech, but instead, I proposed that we sing some patriotic and other national songs by the composer Pospisil, as singing was our second most meaningful Sokol activity.

The war and our daring dreams for freedom increased the need for both vertical and horizontal structural coordination within the Sokol organization. This was especially true during the first years of the war when the political giants of our country could not decide in which direction they should move. Sokol led the way in convincing these leaders that it was time to stand and be counted where separation from Austria and freedom for Czechoslovakia was the issue. Taking the lead, the Sokol units, through their Sokol families, their places of employment and their social connections spread the word throughout the nation. The result of this effort was reflected in the orders issued by the districts and the units which cited the importance of the movement and the need for its successful conclusion. Politically, it became necessary to prevent any proclamation by the districts or the units protesting the foreign activities of Professor Masaryk, as requested by the Austrian officials. Another danger to Sokol occurred when the successor to Emperor Franz Joseph, the emperor Karl, who after his successful coronation as Emperor of Hungary, wanted to be crowned as Emperor of Bohemia and wanted the Sokol units to take part in the ceremony. For this reason, it was decided that the units and districts would separate

as a single organization. In its place, two members of the governing board, if they remained out of military service, would travel around the districts to keep all units informed and to direct all to engage in the same activities.

The heart of all Sokol activities revolved around the gymnasiums. That was why after the dissolution of the ČOS in 1915, the districts and units greatly increased their physical activities through more schooling of instructors and direct involvement with the units. This intercourse with the units became more alive and cordial than before and spread throughout the Sokol movement. This supervisory activity, without title, was compensated by the closer ties developed between the units. Their task was to maintain this atmosphere of mutual confidence.

When a district meeting was called at Kostelec, I agreed to attend with a brother who was the sectional organizer for men. We agreed to meet at the railroad station hours before train time so that we would be assured of getting on the once-a-week train to our destination. A few of the sisters came with us for company and brought with them some baskets of vegetables such as hard-to-get onions and garlic. Imagine our disappointment when we reached the ticket window and discovered a tablet which stated the train was sold out. Of course, the sectional organizer and I had to be in Kostelec for the meeting. We decided to travel to Hloubetin by streetcar and walking to the train station there to catch the train. We were detained by Sister Tuma, so that when we approached the train, we saw it was full of sisters waving to us from the windows. With grief in our hearts, for once again being too late, we slowed our steps. The train had been standing at the station for quite a while until finally, the conductor called to us, "Since we are waiting for you, at least hurry up!" Such was the national solidarity.

The visits to units by district representatives was not governed by Sokol laws. The visitors found it necessary to show interest in unit activities, praise them and contribute in whatever way possible. Sometimes these visits also became an adventure. I remember that after the gymnastics exhibition at Privory (near Prague), there were no more train connections to Prague. We refused private accommodations because we did not want to awaken our hosts so early in the morning. We waited in an inn where there were benches and tables on which we slept with our heads on our arms resting on the tables

until it was time to depart. But we were young, and the discomfort was tolerable. It was still dark when our train left for home. When we arrived, the first one out the station door fell and then the second one and so on. We found everything covered with ice making it treacherous to walk or climb stairs. We skated in our shoes on the ice to a fishpond and we crossed over on a bridge without hand railings. When we arrived at the station, one of the sisters laughingly asked if I was going to school dressed as I was. I finally was able to get a cab to take me home, where I changed into clean clothing and then proceeded to school. Despite these adventures, we went again when the next occasion to travel came.

Of course such attendance at these activities was infrequent. I did need to travel by myself from Prague by train and by walking to units in the district where I functioned as a district organizer. When I was spending vacation time and needed to travel, I was required to utilize a road through a forest. Normally, I was not afraid of walking through the woods or wondering who was hiding in them. Then one night I saw what appeared to be a cigarette light and too late I realized it was a Saturday night, a night when many soldiers walked to the dance that was nearby. Fortunately, I had enough time to avoid the people by stepping into a thicket. Soon thereafter, I saw more and more lights, so I avoided them all by hiding behind a tree a short distance away. After that experience, I used a seldom-used path to avoid further problems.

In 1915 or 1916, I was elected as an instructor for Sokol Karlín. The position caused me to leave my vacation and journey to Karlín for marching practice on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons and other types of training on Wednesdays and Fridays. In 1917 and 1918 I would go riding with my daughter while we were on vacation in Horní Kostelec which was near Červený Kostelec in the region of Jirasek and Nemcova. I would read to my daughter, Alena, the "Grandmother Chronicles" and then we would visit the places mentioned in the book. The local unit in the area did not conduct gymnastic training because all the men were in service and the sisters, in addition to their full employment, also had the responsibility to care for their families, their homes and in some cases, their small farms. I became acquainted with the women during our walks to gather mushrooms and they all agreed that they truly missed their physical training.

I decided to assist the sisters in reactivating the train-

ing program and announced that training for small girls would begin. After the first girls' class, the boys asked if they could also train. Of course, I gave them permission to participate. Following the next gym period, both junior boys and girls came and requested to also join the classes. Because the gym floor was small, I assigned the students into classes and scheduled them. The small boys and girls drilled in the first hour and the junior boys and girls, along with women, drilled during the second hour. I then asked the women to search for any brother who, after being injured during military service returned home. They found two who were able to contribute, so we formed evening classes for men and one for women. For a long time thereafter, it was good to revisit the unit and renew my friendships. Fifty years later I met one of the instructors, Sister Kejzlarová at the Sokol Slet in Vienna.

The Barak District was fortunate because its pillars, Father Stepanek and Agustin Pechlát, were not in the army so we could solicit their help in arranging schools on Sunday for women. Some of the members of Prague's units lived out of town and they attended class whenever they could. These classes were very important to the women advancing from the junior classes because many changes in gymnastics were taking place. These changes, mainly rigid, static movements in calisthenics, were replaced by soft circling movements and dancing steps, introduced by American Br. Čermak. These changes were not easy to learn or teach and they continued throughout the war and a year thereafter, until the new direction had penetrated all units.

The focus, from which the new directions spread, was Žižkov Sokol with the trinity of Augustin Očenášek (journalist of Sokol topics), Karel Pospisil and Hana Dubová, leading the way. While the ČOS had resolved to support the changes, they could not be made because of the war and the lack of available men. After the dissolution of the ČOS, the newly established instructions could not be ratified in district meetings of instructors, but the changes were noted. The districts met regularly and worked developing a training syllabus. Because the varied opinions, regarding the new methods, were not uniform, and often, interpretations were incorrect, it became necessary to call all leaders of women's training into working sessions that would clarify the new directions. These instructions discussed the merits of the system and instilled uniformity into the Sokol program to

assure proper usage by the units.

A formal meeting conducted on June 19, 1918, was called by the Gymnastics Association of Ladies and Girls of Prague. Its purpose was to assemble most of the district instructors and the bulk of younger specialists in training who could not be certified because of the war. Experts of the new methods and Miss Dubská from the Dalcrozeova School, Dr. Vojáčková who propagated the teachings of the American, and Dr. Mensendiek were also invited to the meeting. The negotiations were conducted on a high standard, and they served to refute many of the objections against the new direction and recommended partial adoption of some of the fundamental changes to the old method of Sokol training in calisthenics. In addition to the program changes, the conferees formally elected nine members of the board for training instructional staff for ČOS. I was one of those elected to this embryonic component of training women instructors. This meeting was the final meeting for Sokol training and organizational development during the war.

The Sokol movement had now matured. As I have explained in previous Chapters, Tyrš founded Sokol as an element of a national movement to free the people from Austrian rule. Now, fifty-two years after the founding date, Sokol was prepared to react to the declaration of war by Austria, brought about by the events in Serbia. The ČOS president, by proclamation placed himself at the head of a nation whose political objective was independence. The Sokol brothers who were called to military duty in the Austrian Army despised their roles and knew they really belonged on the other side. Through a system of special badges, identity cards and an unwritten agreement not to fire their weapons, the Sokol brothers made every attempt to cross over to the allied lines at the first opportunity. When ČOS received a report that the Austrian government was preparing special examinations for Czech recruits concerning their loyalty to the monarchy, they cautioned their members. The Austrian government, from the beginning, had followed Sokol activities with serious distrust and now imposed additional constraints against Sokol members. The Moravian Governor Blyleven warned the Austrian Secretary of the Interior, by letter, which was intercepted by Sokols, that in his opinion, the Sokols were the most destructive and dangerous element in the monarchy, and that they were working for its defeat and ruin.

In the news provided by the poet Josef Machar to Professor Masaryk, came information that the monarchy was preparing to persecute Sokols for illegal activities. In fact, such persecution had begun in October 1914, by the arrest of Sokols in Jičín, a town about 60 miles northeast of Prague. The extent of this persecution came to light, years later at the spring session of ČOS committees when sister Lásovska, who witnessed the arrests, provided a special report on the subject. The special investigation of Sokol activities involved one district in Brno, which consisted of 25 units. Altogether, the police examined thousands of individuals spread throughout the nation. From my own memory, I know that not even a drummer boy could walk around singing a national song entitled "I am not going to war." Br. Drbal, a Sokol from Tišnov, was downgraded from a reserve officer to a private in the infantry because he dared to use the Czech word for "attention" instead of the Austrian command to control a military formation.

Br. Drbal's wife, the district instructor Anna Drbalová was interned, their oldest son was sent to the Russian front and the two minor children were left home without parents or means to exist. Also imprisoned by the Austrians was Dr. Alice Masaryková, and the wife of Dr. Beneš. These were not isolated cases. Wherever the persecution was stiffest, there the underground against Austrian propaganda was the most zealous. Already in October 1914, some Sokols from Jičín were placed under arrest because they were caught passing out certificates written in Russian to recruits entering the military service stating the bearer was a Sokol. On October 23, 1914, Sokol worker Slavomír Kratochvíl was executed for spreading anti-Austrian propaganda. Such is a sampling of Sokol resistance on the home front and some of the activities conducted by the regular members of Sokol. While the individual contributions were small, taken together they became a significant force in the struggle for liberty and the preservation of our national identity. When my seven-year-old daughter, while on a hunt for blueberries near Hronov (a small town near the Polish border), got into a fight with some German boys from a nearby village over some wooden shoes, that was not just children fighting, that was a consciousness of her nationality and a willingness to defend her developing feelings.

It was only after the war that we learned of heroism displayed by members of the police force by their timely

warnings for Sokol members that came via Tyrš' widow, Renata Tyršová and the police director. Their efforts saved many lives, but were small when compared to the contributions of Sokols participating in the resistance in exile.

When our future president Masaryk decided to initiate resistance to Austrian rule, while based in a foreign country, he counted on Sokol's participation. Together with an old time Sokol member from Malá Strana (Lesser Town, a section of Prague), who was acquainted with Tyrš, they discussed Sokol thoughts and the original purpose of the Sokol movement. Sokol conduct and behavior during the first months of the war confirmed Masaryk's belief that Sokol was going to be the core of resistance to Austrian rule. Therefore, his first action after his decision to resist was to contact the president of ČOS, Joseph Scheiner. He briefed Scheiner on the details of his plans and preparations for resistance and introduced him to Eduard Beneš who was to act as his representative once Masaryk departed for a foreign country. They discussed many alternatives to be included, even the possibility of Russian occupation of the Czech lands. They also discussed the role of Sokol after the war to include preparing Sokol and their members for the many factors they would encounter in the event of a revolution. The discussion with Scheiner went on long into the night at his apartment. Masaryk declared, "I am counting first on Sokols and I rely on them." He charged Beneš to lead all further discussion with Scheiner, so that Šámal, Beneš and Scheiner could become the basic trio of Mafia. Scheiner then gave Masaryk the initial money to be used in the resistance from his own pocket and from Sokol funds.

In the early days of the war, President Scheiner considered traveling to the US with the objective of stimulating support for the Czech cause. He used the pretense of acting as a buyer of cotton for a bank, when he applied for a passport, but his request was denied. Later, from exile, Masaryk insisted Scheiner go to Russia and there, under his authority as the leader of Sokol, take a leading role in organizing military operations in support of the Czech revolution. A detailed schedule of operations was developed but once again, the plans were frustrated when the request for a passport was not approved. Finally, all further plans for Scheiner's activities were cancelled when he was arrested on May 20, 1915. In the events lead-

ing to the arrest, there had been a meeting of the Czech Mafia in Dr. Šámal's office on the previous evening when a call was received that the military was searching for Scheiner's home. It was quickly decided that Scheiner would attempt to escape the country. Eduard Beneš then went to a place on Wenceslaus Square to a location opposite the home of Scheiner to watch and report on activities in the apartment. When the military departed and there was no sign of further activity, Dr. Scheiner returned to his home for clothing and other items to take with him. However, when he entered his home, he was arrested by police who had remained behind after the military departure. He was then taken to Vienna for further processing.

Scheiner's arrest did not frighten the people, but rather served to strengthen the resistance spirit which by now had penetrated the entire brotherhood. From then on, no opportunity was neglected to radiate this spirit of resistance throughout the nation. On 15 November 1915, there was a celebration to honor the 30th anniversary of Fügner's death. The day was declared to be "Sokol Sacrifice Day" in his memory. To commemorate the event, collections of money were made and from the proceeds, a fund was established to help suffering brothers. This was the last official act of ČOS as it was ordered dissolved on 19 November 1915. The dissolution order was based on ČOS activities prior to the war where they had associated with people and organizations in foreign countries and especially their brotherly connections with Russia and Serbia. Because of these reasons, the Austrian Government felt that the continuance of ČOS would be dangerous to the State.

Not even these latest events were able to break Sokol's spirit. The abolition of ČOS brought with it the cancellation of its official Sokol bulletin. Br. Jan Pelican immediately started to publish a private newspaper with a different name, which was the same size and contained the same items as the bulletin. This paper was sent to the addresses of the bulletin subscribers. Upon the departure of President Scheiner, Jaroslav Urban, the director of Sokol Prague, assumed the leadership of Sokol. Members of the dissolved ČOS board continued their activities by allowing district boards to spread Sokol directives throughout the national organization. In this way, ČOS continued to lead the Sokol movement after the organization was dissolved. Thus, the Sokol ideas of

freedom and democracy through the membership continued to be disseminated.

## RESISTANCE—LEGION

On Sunday, 28 June 1914, there was a Sokol Slet in Brno. The preparation for the Slet was very stormy because the German minority was determined to use all their means to prevent it from being held. When their efforts failed, they proclaimed a boycott of the Slet and ordered all the German inhabitants of Brno to leave the city on the day of the Slet to overcrowd the transportation facilities. Despite these efforts, the Slet was held, and spectators filled the stands. The leader of the province declared in his speech that the Czech nation understood the deeper mission of Sokol and their attempt to revolve the centuries-old problem of subjugation. He continued by saying that the Czechs had decided to resume their position of independence and had the strong arm and the will to break the oppression, even if violence was required. The leadership, of course, was the Sokol movement. He ended his speech by saying we are here today with the desire and with the power to be free once again.

During the Slet arrived the news that Crown Prince Ferdinand and his wife had been murdered in Sarajevo. The authorities immediately suspended all festivals and other public gatherings throughout the empire as proof of national grief.

I can still remember my first impression when I heard the news. My impression was one of cheerful reactions because now I thought the day that we had waited for so long was here. We began singing Pospisil's marching songs. Finally, we thought the possibility of a real resistance was here and a realistic mutiny against the Hapsburgs was possible. Further, I felt the event would provide the means for our liberation from the yoke of the Austrian empire for which we had worked for so long. I thought, yes, I'm sure that all Sokols had the same feeling. Of course, the Slet was interrupted.

On the same day in the French city of Bonneville, there was an anniversary congress of French gymnasts. When the news of the Sarajevo event became known, the French leader turned to his neighbor on the platform, who was the president of the Paris Sokol and asked the question, "What is going to happen to you if war comes and France is dragged into it. You are Austrian citizens?" The president knew his brothers. He knew

he could speak for them. He answered, "We will go in with you." Paris Sokols fulfilled the president's pledge with honor, for on the day of France's entrance into the war, all the men of the Paris Sokol, behind the Sokol flag, marched to the recruiting station and enlisted in the service of France. With them marched their instructor, and a flag bearer. This unit, with its Czech leadership became famous on the battlefield as the troop "Nazdar," named by their French companions after their word of greeting. Half of the unit never returned as they gave their lives for freedom of their old and new countries.

At about the same time in the vicinity of Kyiv in Ukraine, both Czechs and Slovaks from nearby cities assembled and formed a unit called Družina (team or group) by enlisting into voluntary service with the Czar's army. The Družina unit consisted mostly of Sokol instructors who, at that time, were teaching physical education in the Russian middle schools. This group and the Paris Nazdar troop became the embryos of the later Czech-Slovak Legion which became famous because of their stubborn struggle in the first world war.

Meanwhile, on the home front of Bohemia, Sokols drafted into the Austrian Army took with them their Sokol pins and membership documents. Their intention was to pass through the allied lines and join their friends fighting for liberty. The previous half-century of Sokol education now became the basis of convincing not only Sokols, but Czech non-Sokols who might otherwise have wavered where their duty laid.

The Czech Legion was later filled out with captives and deserters from the Austrian army from all three fronts (Russian, French and Italian). When Slovaks joined the cause, the Legion became the Czech-Slovak Legion. On some fronts, whole Austrian units, because of the Sokol influence, switched sides and became part of the Legion. In Russia, the Czar's government was reluctant to commit the Legion into battle. The first time they were committed was 3 June 1917 in a big battle near Zborov. The Czech fighters made a deep penetration into the enemy lines, which was aided by the help of friendly neighboring Russian units. As it was, they had to cut their way back to friendly lines. Soon after this event the moderate socialist, Menševici, broke out of the Russian lines, and then came the downfall of the Czar's government and imprisonment of his family. The Bolsheviks then concluded a separate peace with Austria and Germany,

which caused the Czech-Slovak Legion to be separated from their homeland and the western battle lines. The only way to rejoin the allied effort was to go around the world. They wanted, of course, to rejoin the fight for freedom in their country. In Russia both sides tried to convince the Legion to join them as the Czechs represented the best trained and best led force remaining in Russia, but they refused. After long negotiations and many broken promises, the Czech-Slovak legionnaires fought their way to Vladivostok. Their heroic progress was watched and admired by many foreign countries and people of influence. Their passage was immortalized by romantic writers such as Medek, Langer and others.

**EDITORIAL COMMENT.** The heroic legionnaires became a 50,000 strong army that was stranded in Siberia during World War I. There they fought both the Germans and Bolsheviks, seized the Trans-Siberian Railroad, and with the armed train crossed Siberia, a 5,500-mile journey to Vladivostok at the Sea of Japan. There, 56,000 legionnaires held the city until the allies arrived to transport them in 1920, by sea and rail, to their new country, Czechoslovakia. The leadership of the Sokols in this effort was critical as recognized by the future president of Czechoslovakia (detailed below).

On all fronts the leadership and initiative of the Legion was provided by Sokol members, as based on their many years of Sokol training and education. This fact was discussed many times by President Masaryk and especially during his welcome in Pilsen in 1919. On that occasion he stated, "When we were forming the Legion in Russia, whose merits you all know, the Sokol ideals were the basis on which we built our first Czechoslovak Army." Next to the Hus and Tabor traditions, it was the Sokol ideals and discipline that were used as the basis for training and the example that enabled individuals to know what to expect and to become second nature in their actions. It was Sokol that governed the actions of our victorious army.

In 1917 onward, when the Czech-Slovak Legion in Russia increased in strength, many non-Sokols found their way into their ranks as a means of eventually returning to their native land. Some of these newcomers were communists who tried to both disband the Legion and to convince the members to join the Bolshevik movement. Out of the original Sokol group was Colonel Josef Švec who had participated in their heroic struggles.

He was a former Sokol and teacher from Třebíč, Moravia, who recognized the communist danger to the liberation movement. To warn his fellows Sokols of the danger to their objective, he shot and killed himself. His warning was heeded, and the legionnaires were saved.

The Czech resistance to Austrian governance was supported by Sokol units in many European countries, especially in Paris. Far more important, however, were the esteemed Sokol units located in the United States, who at that time were associated with the Czech American community of Sokol and the Federation of Slovak Sokol. The American Sokol units were the ones counted on by ČOS President Joseph Scheiner to provide financial support for the liberation movement. It was for this reason he gave Masaryk, before his departure from Bohemia, the letters from Sokol recommending support from Czech American bankers for the liberation movement. When Scheiner's freedom was restricted, Vojta Beneš, a Czech politician and brother of Eduard Beneš, was sent to support the freedom effort because he was connected to Scheiner's friends. The American Sokol units became the base for the Czech freedom movement abroad because of the influence they were able to exercise upon the American public and the success they had in providing the much-needed support for the Masaryk efforts.

As Sokol was the focus and main supporter of domestic resistance, so were they the backbone of the resistance abroad. When Professor Masaryk left Bohemia for a for-

eign country from where he would lead the struggle for Czech liberation from the Austro-Hungary Empire, he faced the problem of other countries being ignorant of the Czech problem. What did the rest of the world know about the Czech and Slovak lands? What did they know of their struggles for freedom or their efforts to maintain their national culture within the framework of a Germanic and Hungarian atmosphere? Only in areas where Sokol units were located, such as in Europe and in America, was there strong support by friends of Sokols or individuals exposed to Sokol Slets, for the liberation efforts. Thus, the only intercourse with the liberation movement came about through the Sokol movement and it was on this knowledge that Masaryk and Beneš would build their effort.

At home we all practiced resistance to the Empire and leaned on our Sokol contacts to enhance our efforts. President Scheiner knew the chairman of the Union of French gymnasts, Joseph Sansboeuf, from birth, so he was able to maintain a political relationship with him. In a letter he wrote to Scheiner, he confessed that one of his most fortunate impulses was to maintain contact with his Czech friends. Through his trips to Bohemia before the war, he had come to understand the Sokol objectives and their national desires for freedom. Mr. Sansboeuf was able to ease the way for both Masaryk and Beneš in their political contacts in France and he provided substantial help in their liberation efforts.



## FROM SLAVERY TO FREEDOM — 1918

### OCTOBER 28, 1918

The struggle on all fronts had finally ended and the Austrian Army was crushed. The famous day of October 18, 1918 began when the National Council in Prague declared that the Czechs and Slovaks were dissolving their union with the Austro-Hungarian Empire and declaring themselves to be a free and independent nation. Words, however, must give way to action. Prague was still under the military control of the Austrian General Kestránk and a General Zanantoni who had loyal Romanian regiments under their command. Since it was necessary to remove military command from their hands, it was believed that no one could do it except the Sokols. Through action authorized by the national council, the president of ČOS, Josef Scheiner, in full Sokol uniform dress, proceeded to the territorial military commander to resolve the problem. The generals at first hesitated to relinquish their authority, but when they saw the Sokols in their red shirts flood into the building, the courtyard and the surrounding areas, they quickly submitted. Meanwhile, all Sokols were called by roster to assemble in their gym halls, and from there they quickly occupied all Prague barracks and disarmed all Romanian and Austrian soldiers. Once Prague was in the hands of the national government, the situation became the same throughout all garrisons in the country. Everywhere Sokols disarmed entire hostile regiments without opposition.

The events I've described in the preceding paragraphs I learned much later from individuals who participated in these historic events. As for myself, I started this famous day by organizing my dwelling in Smichov (a Prague region near the west bank of the Vltava River) where we had recently relocated after a long and hard search for new quarters. Because the schools were closed

due to a heating problem, I sent my daughter, Alena, to her grandmother's house in Karlín so my work would not be interrupted. Before noon, when I left to pick up my daughter, my heart nearly stopped when I saw store windows full of red and white ties and bands. There were no streetcars to be seen, so I hurried along the street until I was stopped by the crowd of people rolling out of Kinghoffer's factory gate. One of the workers was lagging so he could light his cigar. His companion asked him where he had gotten a cigar and he said, "I have been hiding this for four years so I could celebrate once we are free." Clearly, he had been carrying his treasure in his pocket so he could celebrate from the first moment of freedom. Now that I knew the reason for the celebration, I didn't have to ask why the streetcars were not running. The streets were so full of people, they could not have gotten through. Now I did not hurry anymore. The only way one could move was to be carried along with the crowd which was hastening to the center of the city. Soon the people began removing all replicas of the Austrian eagles and retaining them as keepsakes in celebration of the moment. The crowd stopped an officer who quickly offered them his hat with a smile so someone could cut out the eagle. He was quickly compensated for his loss when he was given a red and white tie by a girl. I bought some souvenirs and then made my way to Karlín where I could share the glory of the day with my daughter.

With Alena, I tried to reach the center of the city and I saw streams of people walking through Praska Brána (Prague Gate). I wanted to reach Old Town, so I selected a route through some narrow side streets. A woman reproached me for exposing my daughter to such danger. Later I understood her apprehension at the entrance to the square. There the square was empty and across

the area were Austrian soldiers kneeling with their guns aimed toward the center of the square. At the town hall was a small group of men whom I recognized as some political figures. I stopped under an arcade and watched the events unfold. After a short period, some of the group separated and under a white flag approached a group of the Austrian officers gathered at the base of the Hus monument. Following a short negotiation period and a cautious command, the soldiers in a defensive formation departed the square. In a few seconds, the square was full of cheering, singing people. Apparently, I had been a witness to the capitulation of the last Prague group of the Austrian army.

### **FREE, BUT ...**

When the bright blaze of victory was extinguished and the reality of the current situation became apparent, the need to move from the blows suffered in battle to the requirements of peace-time effort was realized. With the end of the war, some said that Sokol was no longer needed. Of course, the Sokol membership replied that achievement of liberation did not mean that the Sokol movement was no longer needed. On the contrary, Sokols maintained that their ideas and concepts were needed as much in peace as they had been in war. After becoming a free country there appeared to be no need to re-educate and sustain the nation. But it was not enough to just fight for freedom, it was also necessary to hold it, and to wisely use it. The development of future events soon confirmed the correctness of this view.

The nation manifested the Sokol view by the flood of applications for Sokol membership that the units received. From the leading Sokol publications came the information that the quantity of applications was overwhelming the ability of the units to provide adequate training staffs or even space in the building to accommodate all the new members. Sokol was, however, able to return to their original mission of gymnastic training.

Now, after the forced four-and-one-half year pause in the creative and organizational work of Sokol, the stored-up energy needed an outlet. Before the newly restored organization could be properly reconstituted, in January 1919, there began an investigation by prominent Sokol specialists into the procedure that was to be used concerning gymnastic training activities within the Republic. The special committee produced the following

recommendations:

- All school and military education should be based on the Tyrš Sokol methods.
- All individuals aged 18 to 24 were to participate in gymnastic training activities.
- There was to be increased instruction in gymnastic training activities for all teachers.
- A special institute for gymnastics education would be established.

For four and one-half years there had not been an election of delegates to the central committee and for three years, ČOS did not officially exist. The only activity that occurred was done illegally and in secret. At the last official meetings of committees on May 10, 1914, the Sokol organization and associated training assemblies listed 38 districts, 1,180 units (with 97 women's sections) consisting of 106,158 men and 21,939 women for a total of 128,097 members.

Although ČOS became active again during the early hours of October 18, 1918, by their calling the Sokol brothers in uniform back to their gym halls, during the first months after liberation many revolutionary tasks had to be performed. Thus, normal Sokol activities were set aside. We had our own nation now, but what kind? The authorities who, until yesterday, had performed under orders from Vienna, now had no official status or recognition by the citizens. The police and other security figures who not so long ago were shooting into the crowds were now held in contempt by the people. The returning military men were in a demoralized state. The nation was suffering from the four years of war and while many were still in a state of shock, there were others who made the best of the situation caused by the war's end and the subsequent revolution.

Sokol now stepped into the national picture when they were commissioned by the national committee to provide the manpower to staff the guard forces and to oversee the security and safety of national property. They protected the storehouses of clothes, arms, ammunition and other items; they uncovered storehouses of hidden merchandise located in the German speaking territories and prevented their removal. They guarded artistic collections and provided security at military barracks, railroad stations, tracks, and bridges. In general, they provided the day and night orderliness and calm needed. To provide for the safety of the Republic, all Sokols, young

and old, stood 12- to 16-hour watches in accomplishing their tasks.

Within three to four days after the revolution, all national property was under the protection of Sokol. The Sokol leaders were nominated to positions of commanders of garrisons and administrators of security departments. Soon all executive power of the National Committee was in the hands of Sokols. The red in the Sokol shirts gave the people a sense of security and spirit to cooperate with the authorities. This voluntary and unselfish Sokol service to the Republic lasted until 15 December 1918 when other means of control were undertaken.

**EDITORIAL COMMENT.** The need for security in this time of transition was critical, and it was Sokols that, because of their trained members, were able to fill this need. The continuing tradition of guards at Prague Castle began with its onset in 1918.

In a few days after the revolution, the National Committee began organizing Army units. Our Sokol brother, Scheiner, was formally appointed as the Inspector General of the Army. Soon it was revealed that the Austrian portion of the army was demoralized and unreliable. It was apparent that they were practically useless.

Later Scheiner wrote about some of his experiences as Inspector General. One experience he shared with us concerned an incident where he needed 26 men to unload material from a train. Although he had a manpower pool of 2,000 men who were being fed each day, he found it impossible to recruit the needed men. By noon he was able to send 13 men to the train but 12 of these disappeared on the way to the station and the remaining man rejoined his wife at the station.

The Sokol guards and their volunteer regiments in Slovakia remained on duty into December, at which time they were replaced, and the men returned to their homes and to their gym halls. They returned with a sense of modesty and without making claims against the state and with their reward being the knowledge of a job well done. Even Dr. Scheiner, who had served as the Inspector General during this most difficult time, returned to his non-military duties. Only Jindra Vaníček remained with the Ministry of Defense where his duties concerned the development of a program for the physical training of the Army. This task by Physical Director Vaníček was

not a reward, but simply his next assignment, because there was no one more qualified than he to perform this work. The Sokols, as an entity, while they had performed the lion's share of duties during the liberation, sought no special recognition, but remained as an equal among equals. They did not seek any special advantage or preference of any kind and they abided by their instruction from Tyrš who taught them that their motto was "wish nothing and give all."

## SLOVAKIA

The Czechoslovak Republic was declared an entity by the National Council in Prague on October 28, 1918. Slovaks responded to this declaration at a meeting in Turčiansky Svätý Martin, but their transition from a province of Hungary to an independent nation was not as smooth as that of Bohemia and Moravia. The reason was that they lacked the benefit of Sokol and its teachings. Slovakia had no Sokol because they were ruled by Hungary for a thousand years. The Hungarians were unyielding in their subjugation of the Slovaks in their schools and by preventing them from forming Sokol units. The Slovaks that were educated knew about Sokol from their travels to Vienna and Budapest and from their Sokol visitors from America during the periods of the 1907 and 1912 Sokol Slets.

After each of those two Slets, the Slovak Sokols in the US encouraged their European brothers to form their own Sokol clubs, but such attempts were foiled by the Hungarian authorities. Finally, in November 1918, the first Slovak Sokol was formed in Uherská Skalice with Pavel Bláho as its first president. By the end of November 1918, additional units were formed in Rovné, Holice and in Predmier. A further spreading of Sokol was slow because of the strong resistance by the Hungarian garrisons who would not submit to the will of the Slovak people.

The Slovaks quickly realized they did not have the resources to fight against the organized Hungarian Army garrisons, so they cabled an appeal to Prague Sokol for assistance. The first corps of Sokol volunteers came from Sokol units in Kladno, Nymburg, Moravské Slavácko, Prague and Zelezný Brod. They were joined by a group of sailors who were mostly Sokols. The volunteers were immediately classified as regular troops and organized in accordance with an understanding between Czech

Sokol President Scheiner, Inspector General of the Czechoslovak Army and the Slovak leaders Vavro Srobar, Pavel Bláho, Samuel Zoch (an Evangelical pastor) and others. These volunteers went to Uherské Hradiště in south-east Moravia for training and subsequent formation into the First Regiment for Slovak Liberty. The chief training instructor was Jarka Jelinek from Podebrady, in central Bohemia and the regimental officers were all Slovaks. Jelinek later immigrated to the US and served the American Sokol Organization as Director of Men and leader of Slets. Among the instructors of the regiment was the outstanding brother Bohumil Tesař, professor of physical culture who had recently returned from the battlefields because of wounds received there.

The strongest occupying force in Slovakia was the garrison at Bratislava, which was the residence of many Hungarian offices and the location of strong Hungarian and German units. The objective of this force was to maintain Hungarian control over the province of Slovakia. Finally on the night of 1 January 1919, the Czechoslovak units were able to occupy the capital city of Bratislava and the Slovak government prepared to set up their headquarters. The Hungarians and Germans threatened to militarily oppose the occupation because they felt the Czechoslovak units were not strong enough to maintain the occupation. Once again, an appeal by district official Samuel Zoch was sent to ČOS requesting the organization to send 500 armed men to Bratislava to support the Slovak government entry into the city on 4 January 1919.

When ČOS received the appeal for help, they decided that rather than sending armed men, they would arrange a large Sokol expedition in Slovakia. President Scheiner replied that it was impossible to provide such an expedition within two days. But, when a second and then a third telegram was received describing the dangerous situation and the need for further action, Scheiner asked the Monday papers to publish an appeal for volunteers to go to Bratislava on 4 January 1919. The result was that 2,480 men in full Sokol uniforms responded to the appeal and the Slovak government guaranteed that food and accommodations would be made available to the force. Unfortunately, through sabotage and passive resistance by Hungarian and German employees, all preparations for the force were foiled.

The Sokol volunteers had spent a long night journey

to reach their destination and had subsisted on food furnished by their wives and mothers. After eating the last of their rations, they were still hungry and cold, but the Hungarians could not hear their rumbling stomachs. Many years later, while in Washington, one of the volunteers, Jaroslav Drábek, described this journey and the many inconveniences encountered.

To continue their resistance to the occupation, the Germans in Bratislava purchased all the tickets to the celebration exhibition at the National Theater so that the auditorium would be empty. But the peace was preserved for at least a short time. In March, the Hungarians, in conjunction with the socialists and communists, once again seized power with the objective of restoring Hungarian domain. Without a formal declaration of war, they invaded an unprepared Slovakia and occupied a few cities. In a republic hardly seven months old and with an unprepared army, the Slovak government, once again turned to ČOS for help. On 3 June 1919, a telegram was received and an immediate appeal for volunteers was printed in the national papers. Applications flooded into the headquarters and by 5 June, the first battalion was on its way to Slovakia. ČOS secretary Jan Pelikán wrote that the effect of the appeal was hard to describe. Applications were received by telephone and telegraph and arrived in such volume that it was almost impossible to list all the volunteers' names.

The few Slovak Sokol units in existence had not been idle during these periods of stress. Several units stopped all regular gymnastic activities and sent many brothers and junior boys directly to the front lines. The youngest victim killed in action was a youth of 15 who was shot while on guard duty. ČOS continued its appeal for assistance and even extended their appeal to the group gathered in Nancy, France for a Slet of French gymnasts.

ČOS now turned to the Ministry of National Defense and signed an agreement with them which resulted in Sokol being able to draft brothers who were not registered in the national army as either regulars or volunteers. This separation was not easy, for after 16 draft calls during the four years of war, 86 thousand Sokol brothers had been drafted and over 35 thousand had seen front line service. Those Sokol brothers who refused to respond to the draft without an adequate excuse were immediately expelled from Sokol. This action served to purge all those who had sought membership in Sokol to

share in the glory and popularity of the Sokol movement but were not willing to serve the Sokol causes.

Though the Sokol volunteers were in accordance with the national government to be used in garrison and guard duty so others could be used in the fighting, this provision was soon discarded. On 7 June 1919, the Sokol units were shifted to the front lines near Nové Zámky in southern Slovakia where they performed brilliantly.

French General Eugene Mittelhauser, of the allied forces, evaluated the Sokol performance on 7 June 1919 using these words: "The achievement in the sector of Major Bonneau this day exceeded the expectation of the Supreme Command. The advance of 30 kilometers in the burning sun, interrupted twice by full scale battles, was a true war action that could only be expected from highly trained and dedicated soldiers." There was great joy in the main headquarters in Bratislava when word was received during the night that Nové Zámky, a city in southern Slovakia near Bratislava, had been recaptured by Sokols in the vanguard of the victorious force. So, thanks to Sokol's help, the days of anxiety ended joyfully. The advance of the Hungarian communists stopped, and Bratislava was rescued.

## THE TRIP TO TURČIANSKY SVÄTÝ MARTIN

**EDITORIAL COMMENT.** Sokol was not permitted in Slovakia because the ruling Hungarian government regarded it as a threat and a route to Slovak independence. Even though Sokol clubs were established in the US in the 1890s, the first clubs in Slovakia appeared only with the formation of Czechoslovakia in 1918. The trip to Turčiansky Svätý Martin, a historic town and region, occurred in 1919 when Sokol clubs were beginning to appear throughout Slovakia. Thus, the trip was timely and Czech Sokols encouraged and aided the establishment of the Sokols clubs.

Interest in Sokol membership spread throughout Slovakia. In the more educated regions of the country, the old desire to belong to Sokol was fulfilled, but in western villages, the peasants soon recognized the difference between the Hungarian and Czechoslovak regimes. A former instructor of Slovak Sokol in the US, who had emigrated to America before WWI, told me about conditions in Slovakia during his youth. He was born and reared in a small village where no one in the village understood a single word of Hungarian. The

public school consisted of a single classroom and the Hungarian authorities hired a Hungarian teacher who did not speak one word of Slovak. Naturally, he taught his classes in Hungarian, which the children did not understand. But it made no difference to him because he received his pay and the children complied with the law which required school attendance until the age of 14. When the children left school, they could neither read nor write Hungarian or Slovak. This inability stayed with this Slovak brother until his arrival in America where he witnessed his neighbors reading the newspapers while seated on their front steps. He picked up a discarded newspaper and asked for assistance in first reading letters and then entire words. Because he was an intelligent person, he picked up a fundamental general education and became a respected citizen.

Initially, all Sokols in Slovakia were in one district headquartered in Bratislava. But after the number of units increased, the size and geographic composition of Slovakia made it necessary to organize the Sokol units into six districts which were named after the regions in which they were located.

The transportation system in Slovakia was in very poor condition, which greatly reduced the number and size of trains available. There was no heat in the passenger cars because all the windows in the train had been removed and could not be replaced because of a glass shortage. The trip to Vrútky lasted 24 hours in a crowded train car filled with passengers and luggage. Finally, when we arrived, we had to transfer to a local train in Martin. At Martin, we found a similar situation, i.e., rooms and passages were filled with people and luggage, so that it was difficult to find a seat except on the luggage while we waited for our connection. As we waited, we discovered that other delegates to the meeting were there, such as Director of Women Milada Malá, and the representative of Moravian districts, Anna Drbalová.

In Martin we encountered further unpleasantness. When we tried to rent rooms for the night, we found only one room for the five of us, and had to make do. Before daybreak the chamber maid awakened us because another room became available. While this accommodation was not much, at least we had a room and we were warm. Having just begun sleeping again, we were awakened again by voices calling out in Slovak, "here they are, we found you."

These words were our first Slovak greetings and welcome by instructors from the newly formed districts. This meeting was our first with Slovaks and it was love at first site. Most of all I remember Brother Koza, an American who came back to live in his homeland.

President Masaryk had personal friends who lived in a small village near Turčiansky Svätý Martin. He visited there for the purpose of horse riding before the war, but since his election as president his visits were problematic. Although he tolerated the nuisances in his office, the constraints of a bodyguard were a problem for him. The government could not make an exception to the rule because of the potential threat to his safety. So after a long consideration, it was decided that the Sokols would provide his safety under the responsibility of Bohumil Tesař, a professor in Turčiansky Svätý Martin. Later, Masaryk purchased a house in the village from the proceeds of his book *World Revolution*.

Shortly thereafter, I had a chance to witness the results of Hungarian rule in Slovakia. During a trip to the Nitra Sokol District, I went for a walk outside the city and saw a man in a folk costume approaching me. When he came near me, he jumped over the side of a ditch and into the field, turned toward me and bowed. When I asked why he did this, he answered "we are not to be in the way of a lady." This incident was an example to me of how the simple Slovak people had been educated by the Hungarian government. However, in Martin we did meet many intelligent and knowledgeable Slovaks. It was Sokol that became the firm glue between the two nations, Slovakia and Bohemia/Moravia.

## THE FIRST MEETING OF THE ČOS CENTRAL COMMITTEE

The end of 1918 brought about a large burden for the Sokol Men's board of instructors. Many changes were made because of the war, due to the need for the organization's safety and in consideration of the military service performed for the good of the republic by so many Sokols. The rebuilt secretary's office, which had been closed during the war, was reopened. The precautions taken by the former board to pay all rents during the war had proved to be a wise step. The new national office holders had to utilize cramped quarters in the rear suite of the palace Sylva Taroucca on Příkopě Street in Prague. These quarters were too small for the officers and espe-

cially tight when meetings were called.

The central committee of ČOS held a meeting in January 1919 for all instructors of men and women in physical training, and for all educators. This was the first time women participated in such a board meeting, and they were carefully prepared for the event. Moreover, prior to this meeting, these women had no instructors who had participated in the planning and coordinating activities of the gymnastics training program for women. Additionally, this was the first time women had the opportunity to implement information obtained from the International Congress of Gymnastics in Paris in 1913. Therefore, to prepare for a meeting in August 1918, the women held a meeting in the Martin building of the Gymnastics Society for Women and Girls. The purpose of the special meeting was to discuss and evaluate the new directions in gymnastics training activities for women.

The August special meeting, which included all the district instructors, concluded that the technical competence of women instructors had to be improved. They also concluded that the group was not fully prepared to accomplish the tasks they would be called upon to perform. I was a newly elected member of the group, and I remember how unprepared I felt to perform my new duties. I had not prepared a presentation on what my new duties were, and these feelings were similar for most attendees. One advantage of this group was the qualifications of the candidates who would attend the meeting in January. Of the eighteen attendees, fully one third had received higher departmental education. Three passed their state examinations and three others were teachers at teaching institutions or other special schools. Even among the older sisters, who did not have a higher education, there were specialists who were teaching or helping in physical education activities in the community schools. In the ČOS, at that time, there was a move to strongly support special education for instructors. I remember that during the selection of candidates for instructor positions, consideration was given not only for their practical knowledge of physical training, but also to their teacher-related education.

With the return of the Czech legionnaires came stories of their glorious deeds and their acts of heroism. Naturally many people wanted to join Sokol and bask in the reflected glory and share in the credit for the role

played by Sokol in the liberation movement. This trend was a great concern of the Sokol leadership, especially President Scheiner. After observing what was occurring with the new members and determining that some of them had collaborated with the Austrian authorities or participated in looting or the black market, strict guidance was issued to all units. Since such recruits could endanger the whole Sokol movement, the ČOS directed the following: 1) all units were to carefully examine the background of all applicants before their acceptance; and 2) compulsory attendance for six months for new members for all training sessions and all lectures on Sokol ideals and mission would be required.

Following the war, at the first meeting of the ČOS, the officers elected were: Joseph Scheiner, President; Milada Malá, Director of Women; and Jindra Vaníček, Director of Men.

### THE 1920 VII SLET

The return of the Czecho-Slovak legionnaires hailed them not only as heroes, but also as soldiers, many of whom believed in communist ideas, and even their incorporation into the communist new republic. The lack of available consumer goods and particularly the shortage of food provided a favorable feeding ground for the revolutionary propaganda spread by these individuals. Accordingly, the new government welcomed the ČOS proposal that a Slet should be held which would direct the country's efforts toward positive, creative work. As soon as the Slet was announced, the communists, which formed the most powerful force opposing the Sokols, protested the idea because they maintained there would not be enough food available to feed the thousands of people who would come to witness the event. This group predicted a famine would follow such a large gathering of people and the overuse of the critically short supply of food. The Slet announcement did not resolve the problem. Its merits were debated time and again within the council. The minister of transportation doubted the country's ability to provide adequate transportation, including adequate railroad cars to equip the required trains. The minister of agriculture said it would be impossible to provide sufficient food to feed the anticipated thousands of visitors. Some ministers stated that there was not sufficient wood available to build the necessary housing or straw available to use as mattresses.

All the objections were valid and serious problems to be considered. The Sokol leadership and members were adamant that the problems could be resolved. A Sokol who was minister of railroads twisted his powerful mustache and then spread out papers on a table, which detailed the train schedules that could be arranged to transport visitors to Prague. His papers also identified the location and status of damaged locomotives and passenger cars that could be salvaged for the operation. He then challenged the Sokol railroad workers to repair the equipment free of charge and in their free time. He also presented a timetable that would need to be met to complete the work on time, even though it meant the workers would lose their vacations.

The Sokol minister of agriculture received binding promises from the presidents of Sokol districts, which were in mostly agricultural areas, that they would provide the necessary straw for mattresses and ample food to feed the expected number people. It was determined by ČOS that Sokol itself would support and maintain their Slet and the only need from the government was the provision of military kitchens with supporting personnel. Other individuals had located ample supplies of wood in enclosures along the river Vltava which would be adequate for the required viewing stands. Once the Government became aware of all these arrangements, they stepped aside and the Sokols began working. The communists continued their demonstrations against the Slet, but the Sokols were not deterred and continued their devoted efforts to bring the Slet into reality. There continued some fears that the communists would set fire to the stands or even cut some of the bearing pillars so they would collapse once they were filled with people, but this did not happen. To prevent such sabotage, Prague Sokol arranged for walking guards around the entire partially built field so that unauthorized personnel could not go near the building area.

The VII Slet became a reality in only one year and eight months after the end of a war which caused much long-time misery and extreme suffering. Moreover, Prague, which had almost starved, now basked in ample food. The agricultural counties had delivered so much food that all kitchens providing for the poor were supplied with large quantities of free food to those who held authorizing vouchers, so they could serve them free lunches and dinners. During the Slet, all who attended

received free food and vouchers were not necessary. On the Slet field, we were supported by the military kitchens and the food was remarkable.

The success of the Slet depended on the support provided by the instructors. So many participants had arrived to participate that in the case of the men, the group had to be divided into two parts and the calisthenics number was performed twice. Today, no one can imagine what work it was to coordinate the activities of so many Sokols to assure their appearance at the proper time, and in the proper location and formation. This Slet was the last to be held in the old Letná stadium, that proved inadequate to handle the mass of Sokols that took part in the 1920 Slet. It must be remembered that there were no telephones or walkie talkies. Our only method of controlling the large numbers of gymnasts was our voice and tin trumpets, and the only means of transportation around the area was our feet.

I was assigned the duty of preparing the small girl's group to accomplish their portion of the program, and to assist with the women's numbers. With the women, I had to correct any problems in their alignment for their composition on the actual Slet days, and during the pre-Slet Sunday rehearsal reserved for the pupils of Prague's schools.

My first task with the small girls went quite well, but the second task with the women required some decisions which were beyond my authority. It was on a Friday before the performance by the boys, when an incident, which I remember, occurred. I was responsible for the afternoon teaching hours and as I had two hours for lunch, I decided to go to Sokol headquarters on Příkopě street instead of lunch. I went to the secretary's office and asked if there was any news I should know about. An officer jumped up when he saw me and asked, "Who sent you?" He went on to state that they had been looking for me since the morning. They couldn't find me and, of course, there was no telephone, so they couldn't call me. I was told that I was to see Brother Pechlát, the small boy's leader, immediately. At once I ran to find him, and he was surprised when I suddenly appeared. He explained to me that they had received news from the Presidential Castle that the president requested to see the little boy's number. We had not planned for this event, so to make it easier for the president, Brother Pechlát proposed that we work out some brief information on the number of boys and present it to him along with his program so he

would have a better understanding of the number. We had been saved by telepathy.

The staking out of a large field for the mass numbers was an interesting chore. The pathways onto the field had to be marked for each stream of individuals to indicate where they divided, turned and stepped. To mark the route, we used flags. We had so many routes on the field that we had to use different colored flags to control the operation. Fortunately, I had many well-trained assistants who had studied the problem and knew exactly where the flags were to be placed. They performed their tasks so quickly and efficiently that we still had a moment of peace before the main calisthenic number was to begin.

The calisthenic numbers used in the 1920 VII Slet were mostly under the influence of the old method of composition. A little rhythm was, however, beginning to appear in some numbers. Up until this time, all Slet calisthenics were tied to the field markers and all individuals did the same movement. Because all spectators were to receive the same view and the number had to be balanced, all drills were performed in all four directions. As the music's sound spread toward the stands, it appeared to the spectators that the participant's movements were like the movement of grain in the field during a moderate breeze. In this drill, Hana Dubová had created a drill in which some of the movements flowed in a fluent manner and all were not completed at the same time. There was some apprehension as to how the new concept would look, but all fears were set aside when all components were performed correctly.

The second concern was the calisthenics drill, where all women did not perform the same movements at the same time. In one part of the drill, they were divided into odd and even lines, which alternated their movements. When one line was kneeling, the other line was performing some symbolic posture. This could not be done on all four sides, but it demonstrated that despite this difference, the drill was still beautiful to watch from all sides. Thereafter, in all later compositions, the four-side repetition by the gymnasts was dropped.

The most important item to come out of the VII Slet was its political and economic effects. The loudest after-war message demonstrated by Sokol, and called by others "unrealistic," was the message that even when a nation is threatened by its very existence, the whole nation can still

have love and create a work of beauty. The Sokol organizers did not even pause in their planning and conduct of the Slet to worry about a profit for the activity. Certainly, profit was not the motive for the Slet, but, of course, contributions were welcomed and appreciated. The Slet created such interest and support that all major activities were sold out far in advance. This was also true of all the competitions, which could not satisfy all ticket demands. There was a story concerning a man who stood by the main entrance to the exhibition hall and offered to pay 1,000 crowns to any one for a ticket to the main attraction. Apparently, there were no takers of the offer. While his offer was not successful, the powers that be did not want to let the visitor from far away depart unsatisfied, so they found a place for him in the arena.

A patriotic scene performed at the Slet contributed materially to the Slet's large financial gain. It was a theat-

rical performance which made use of the large area available, and the great number of potential actors assembled at the site. The scene was developed by a special commission which depicted victory scenes of Jan Žižka (Czech military officer and national hero) and his followers over the professional military force of Emperor Sigmund. This scene was very patriotic and certainly appealed to the sensitivities of the spectators and to their national pride and will to defend their native land.

The end of the VII Slet also brought an end to the women's fight for equality in Sokol. It ended because all objectives had been achieved and women were now completely equal. Because of the war experiences, it was not possible to deny the situation that existed. This equality in Sokol for women was satisfied before women, in general, reached full equality as Czechoslovak citizens.



Marie discussing Czech kroje (costumes) with young women.



Junior girls performing a drill at the 1920 VII Slet.



## IN A LIBERATED COUNTRY

### MASS-CONVENTIONS

The mass-convention was an organizational super-structure positioned above the regular organizational structure and was designed to resolve extraordinary events which required a major change in the rules.

The need for mass-conventions became an ever-increasing requirement because the membership rapidly increased and the formation of additional districts was needed. Moreover, major changes in the thoughts of civilized humanity had occurred. For example, the fifth mass-convention, held in 1910, dealt primarily with the urgent demands by women for admission to advanced education classes and for civil equality. To this demand for progress, some well-meaning men joined the crusade. While accepting women as members had been approved in principle, the details of implementation was left to local boards to resolve.

The sixth convention was not held until ten years after the fifth at which time it faced the task of working out, among other things, the terms for women's membership in Sokol, which proved to be a complicated problem. Following WWI, when the sixth convention was held, the call to attend could no longer be issued on the same terms as previous conventions. The huge growth in membership and the previously authorized number of delegates would have resulted in thousands of attendees, making debate impossible. However, because of the deep respect for higher authority held by the local boards, and their willingness to comply with any rule passed down for implementation, the solution became easy. First, the number of delegates was reduced. Second, the name of the organization was officially changed to Czechoslovak Union of Sokols, rather than Czech Union of Sokol, because Slovakia had established Sokol units.

The need for a mass-convention to be held as soon as possible was now "urgent" because we were an independent nation that was in the throes of developing a free democratic form of government, which foretold many problems. There was the threat from the communists to change our form of government. There was the inheritance of left-over problems from the Hapsburg monarchy; and there was the influence of the clergy to exert political power on the government. Yes, the ČOS board was burdened with many heavy tasks to resolve. Among these tasks were:

- Assist in establishing a new nation.
- Aid against Hungarian invasion of Slovakia.
- Discussions with all national Sokols.
- Discussions with other Sokol organizations.

### THE VII MASS-CONVENTION

Originally, the Sokol mass-convention was considered an election meeting, but it soon became obvious something more was required. Quite early in Sokol history, elections were transferred to a special committee and the main effort of the mass-convention was to resolve problems which exceeded the authority of standing committees. Examples of such problems were rule changes, contacts with other associations, changes to the terms for accepting new members, and any problem that would have a long-range impact on the membership. Initially it was expected that there would be long intervals between mass-conventions, which allowed time for changes in social life, political activities and economic relationships that necessitated updating the old rules and conditions. Such was not the case following WWI because changes were occurring very quickly. It was these changes that brought about the VII Mass-

Convention only a few years after the preceding one.

Despite the many hardships associated with starting a new country, the need for a mass-convention in 1924 became very pressing. Accordingly, ČOS decided that the 1924 mass-convention would be the year's major effort. Preparations for the convention would require a full year, thus ČOS created a commission which was charged with developing a proposed agenda for the convention. The aim was to send the agenda to all districts well ahead of the convention date to allow time for the development of discussions and other inputs to the program. Both commission meetings that year were primarily concerned with the agenda items. In the spring meeting, it was decided to increase the member's interests in convention items by publishing a pre-convention report informing the membership of the various convention tasks and their possible solutions. The convention proposals were then discussed at unit and district meetings. This approach was successful because much discussion was generated and articles concerning these discussions were published in district publications, as well as the local press.

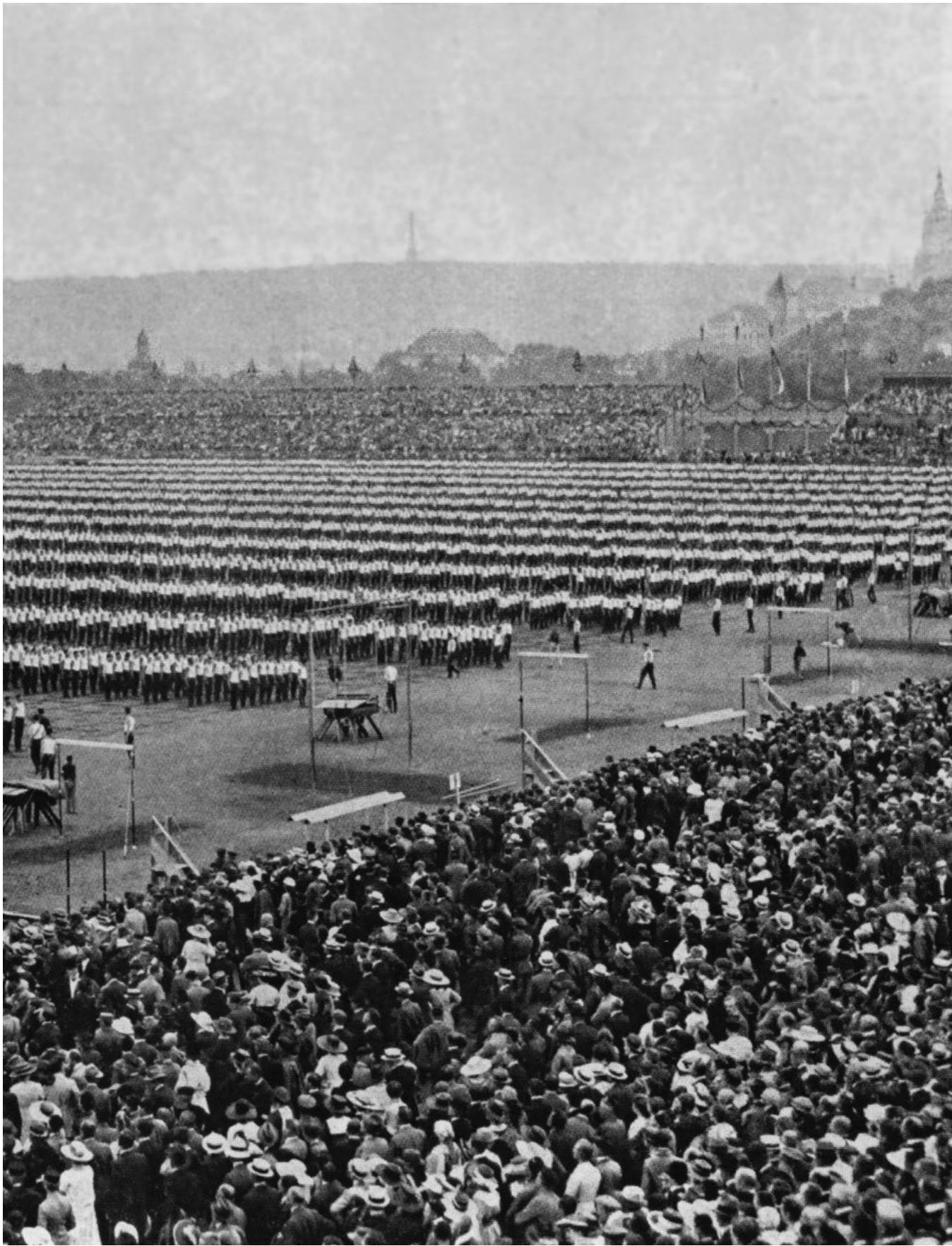
The autumn meeting focused on preparing the convention statement proposal. This proposal did not present a total solution to all pressing problems as it did not address the most important item which was the relationship of Sokol to socialism. Yet the night before the meeting the ČOS Board spent the entire evening debating the question. Finally, Sokol President Scheiner declared that the question could not be avoided. After the meeting,

which brought no solution to the problem, he invited representatives of opposing factions to his home to resolve the problem. He informed the group that they could not leave until a solution satisfactory to all was reached. The result of this conference is considered even today as the best statement of a Sokol idea developed by a committee. The statement and its explanation have been widely published in various documents, so that it became common knowledge among the members. The depth of preparation, and then the mass-convention itself, is a prime example of what President Scheiner called the total democratic leadership of Sokol.

Because the decisions rendered at the mass-convention had such a far-reaching effect on the lives of individuals and their units it was essential that all actions had the total support of all concerned. Surprisingly, one major area of discrimination was in travel expenses paid to delegates to the convention. In the past, individual delegates had been required to pay their own expenses to the convention. To rectify this problem, a motion was made and passed that in the future, ČOS would pay these expenses from their resources. Additionally, it became the responsibility of all delegates to prepare for the convention by discussing all agenda items with their units and attending the convention prepared to present the opinions of their unit. The result of this careful preparation on all proposals and in all matters concerning organizational changes resulted in unanimous acceptance of the convention statement which expressed the best thinking concerning the Sokol ideals in modern times.



Gold Sokol pin from the National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library.



1920 VII Slet, the first in the new country of Czechoslovakia.



## FROM VII TO VIII SLETS, 1920-1926

### LJUBLJANA SOKOL HALL; DEVELOPMENT IN THE US; SLOVAK SOKOL ORGANIZATION

**EDITORIAL COMMENT.** Sokol in Slovenia was enthusiastically received and was the strongest of the Sokol group called "South Slavic Sokol." The group also included Serbia and Croatia. Czechoslovak Sokols enjoyed a close working relationship with this group and therefore not surprisingly held a meeting in Ljubljana, Slovenia.

If we consider the VII Slet as the end of slavery and the beginning of an independent country, then the VII mass-convention was the dotting of an "i" in the transition. The convention results explained all the new ideas and thoughts that had taken place in recent years. Sokol took a firm stand on each item, responded clearly to the item and did not compromise democracy. The education of the emerging nation had been enhanced by that great teacher of democracy, Dr. T.G. Masaryk. The people had tried to display this trait in times past, but with little success. For example, in 1915, we tried to commemorate the 500th anniversary of Jan Hus' death, by displaying a statue of him at Old Town Square. The festival had to be cancelled, but on the night before the scheduled event, Prague's women covered the monument with flowers. We were able to conduct this festival ten years later in 1925 when the entire government, including the president, participated in the celebration. By this act, the Catholic church was offended and as a result, they withdrew their papal legate, (nuncio) from Prague. But a year later at the 1926 VIII Slet, the Sokols performed their own commemorative ceremony honoring Tyrš.

The increased educational activities within the country opened the windows of communication into all of Europe. It was now the time to discover what was happening in the gymnastic community and to re-evaluate our relationship with foreign gymnastic federations.

Foremost in our thoughts was the status of the South Slavic Sokols, which became Yugoslav Sokols in 1919 consisting of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs. The Federation of Slavic Sokols, was reorganized in 1925 under the new title of the "Federation of Slavic Sokols."

The oldest and most devoted portion of the organization was called the Federation of South Slavic Sokols. This group participated in the VII Slet and in November 1920 became affiliated with us in a special status as the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav Sokol; the latter included Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The Czechoslovak Sokols returned the visit by appearing in the Yugoslav Slet in Maribor approximately one-month after the 1920 Slet and by sending a delegation to Osijek in Croatia the next year. In 1922 ČOS again sent a large group to participate in the Slet in Ljubljana, Slovenia. The fraternization between Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia was great, but when the peace conference rejected the request by both nations for establishment of a customs corridor between Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia to open Czechoslovakia's access to the sea, there appeared a sign which read "We will create a corridor of hearts."

In 1925, the Federation of Slavic Sokols was reviewed by the Chairman of Czechoslovak Sokols. He asked the South Slavs for their planned program for the next two years. They replied, "In 1926 we will open in Tyrš House and in 1926 participate in the Prague Slet, with both men and juniors." The 1926 Slet proved to be the only common Slet for junior boys from Czechoslovakia and the South Slavic nations. In that Slet, the fraternization between the juniors was everything we had hoped for. My daughter was a junior at the time and when she returned from the procession, she resembled a Christmas tree with all the different badges and ribbons she collected from the visitors. In turn she had given up most of her uniform

accessories. From the mutual good will created by the visit, it became apparent that the South Slavs were not an empty poster shield but rather a living, breathing, successful, working organization. We not only had common visiting Slets, but we also had common training schools. Whenever the courses taught by ČOS were different than those in the South Slavic area, we taught participants from all their clubs.

The Yugoslav Sokols arranged championship competitions and training schools for the Serb Sokols who, after the stormy incidences resulting from the defeat of Austria could not develop them on their own. When one of the South Slavic Sokols could not, by themselves, arrange for the needed schools, such training was arranged for them by ČOS in Prague. ČOS also undertook the development of schools for judges to eliminate controversy in local and international competitions and so that advancement in these areas would be parallel. The ČOS advanced schools set a high standard and they were very effective in maintaining a high level of training and education in many areas. I well remember a time, twelve years later, when I was attending a judging course and some Sokol sisters taught me how to cook proper Turkish coffee. These courses gave birth to friendships that lasted a lifetime. After many years, these friendships paid off during the days when we were a Protectorate and Yugoslavia was occupied by Germany.

#### ***Ljubljana Sokol Hall***

Following the war, the Slovene Sokol unit in Ljubljana decided to build a new Sokol Hall. To finance the building, they went heavily in debt to a financial institution which was under the influence of the clergy. Halfway through the construction, the bank withdrew its support which necessitated the unit to seek new financing. In distress, the unit turned to ČOS and a committee was formed to resolve the problem. President Scheiner stated in a meeting that we must not allow our brother unit to suffer such a loss. He further suggested that in the Republic, we should be able to find 2,000 people who would be willing to lend 50 crowns each to the Ljubljana unit. The plan was adopted, and we quickly achieved the desired goal. The loan was to be repaid after ten years, but unfortunately, ten years later we were in a deep recession and the unit was not able to meet its full obligation. Some of the debt was paid off and the remainder was

postponed. Later, because of the occupation by the Nazis and the war, the debt was forgiven. In 1948 when Br. Antonín Hřebík and I went to London, Br. Daněk from the London Sokol unit informed us that brothers in the London unit had in their custody, the final installment from Sokol Ljubljana to the Czechoslovak Sokols.

The Ljubljana Sokol brothers felt a deep moral obligation to settle their debt and, therefore, paid the debt as soon as they were able. The president of the South Slavic Sokols Foreign District, Br. Mileč and his co-workers, concluded that the owed money rightfully belonged to ČOS or its heirs and entrusted the London unit with the funds for repayment to ČOS when possible. Because the headquarters of ČOS in exile had not yet been established, we left the funds in London. In 1971, a year after the Slet in Vienna, Br. Hřebík called a meeting of representatives of districts to discuss the funds. I proposed that the money be placed into a building fund from which interest-free loans would be made to units building new Sokol Halls. The motion was adopted. At that same time another Sokol unit was constructing a Sokol Hall in Sydney, Australia, and they asked for financial assistance for the construction. Accordingly, we loaned the total amount of \$1,000 to the unit as way to express a time-honored love between units that would be forever captured in the walls of their unit.

#### ***Development in the United States***

Of all the ČOS foreign friends, our deepest feeling existed for our American friends. There was always the sense that a close relationship with the Sokol units in America was necessary. Sokol had been established there by Czech immigrants only three years after its origin in Prague. This national organization was originally called National Unity Sokol and then became the American Sokol Organization in 1919. Three decades after Czechs founded Sokol St. Louis, the first Slovak Gymnastic Union Sokol was founded by Slovak immigrants. Today, many brothers and sisters ask why there exist two separate organizations, Czech and Slovak. The answer is easily explained when you consider how the organizations originated. Both were founded during the timeframe when the Austro-Hungarian Empire ruled Bohemia, Moravia and Slovakia, and there was little thought that one day they would become united in one country. Therefore, when Czech emigrants arrived in America, they formed their own organization.

When the Slovaks saw the results of these efforts, they founded a similar organization. Both organizations maintained very friendly contacts and participated in each other's Slets. Following WWI and the establishment of Czechoslovakia, much thought was given to merging the two federations, as had been done in Czechoslovakia. However, this course of action was undesirable because the Slovak Sokol also included an insurance company, whereas the Czech Sokol was completely independent.

During WWI, both American organizations were very supportive of Masaryk's efforts to establish an independent Czechoslovak nation. Both Czech and Slovak immigrants provided many volunteers who joined units in England and some even joined the Czecho-Slovak Legion. Before the US entered the war, in 1917, these volunteers had to cross into Canada before they could make their way to their various units in Europe. I met some of these volunteers in the first republic and later when I moved to the US. Following the war, Sokol activists from Czechoslovakia travelled to the US where their contributions to Sokol remain forever an important part of the Sokol movement.

Immediately after the Hungarian problem was resolved in Slovakia, where he played a very important role, Br. Jarka Jelinek, a Sokol from Poděbrady, became an instructor in ASO and later became its leader. Soon after him came Karel Bednar, a Moravian, who also started in Sokol as a regular instructor and who later became a leader of the Slovak Sokol in the US. Each of these men brought their respective federation into full bloom and wrote themselves into the Sokol history of America. Contributing to the growth of Sokols in America was the system of travelling instructors from ČOS to American units and districts. I was fortunate to have two-year tours twice as a gymnastics instructor, which enabled me to renew old friendships and develop new ones. One of my tours took place under the leadership of ČOS President Scheiner. American tours continued and contributed to strong relationships between ASO and ČOS. Whenever some organization, be it a unit or a district, needed assistance, they always turned to ČOS, and they would recommend outstanding instructors. Many young men longed for an experience in America and gladly accepted offers of two-year tours which, in most cases, resulted in permanent residence in the US.

### **Olympic Games**

EDITORIAL COMMENT. In 1924, the Czechoslovak men's gymnastics team placed first in the Olympic Games held in Paris, winning a total of nine medals, more than any of the other eight teams. This is one example of Sokol's effectiveness in training for competitive gymnastics. Moreover, the first Olympic gold medal in gymnastics by an American was won by Frank Kriz of Sokol New York. Thus, the Sokol system provided training for all levels of competence. Sokols were involved in training judges and developing rules for international gymnastics. The need for clearly stated standards and guides for judges became clear as noted in the next paragraph.

In 1925, Prague sent a team of Sokol gymnasts to a competition in Frankfurt that was associated with the International Olympic Congress in Prague. The Prague Sokol brothers did not fair too well in this competition, as they placed fourth, or last, in the standings. As an example of problems with competitions that lack well prescribed rules, this meet was filled with controversies and consisted of a choice of eight or 12 events. Lacking proper instruction regarding the number of team members and judging controversies, the competition was a disappointment.

### **INTERNAL DEVELOPMENT**

An outstanding example of how Sokols contributed to the well-being of the nation was through the 1920 VII Slet and by the defense of Slovakia. Sokols also helped alert the nation of the communist threat to freedom. Following the creation of the state, many political parties became active and there were numerous incidents of in-fighting in the search for power. The hate between these parties was such that it became impossible to arrange a common celebration for the ten-year anniversary of the Republic. Sokol once again stepped into the picture and, with a proclamation to the nation, assembled all groups into a common celebration. At the same time, fascism reared its ugly head in Czechoslovakia, as it had in many parts of Europe. In Czechoslovakia it culminated in an attempt by the Army Chief of Staff, General Rudolf Gajda to conduct a military coup in 1926. A biography of President Tomáš G. Masaryk reveals that Gajda had been preparing his coup for the period that included the Slet, but when he saw the enthusiasm and warm devotion displayed by the Sokols for President Masaryk, he decided to delay the Coup attempt until autumn. In the fall, when the Coup failed, General

Gajda was stripped of all rank and honors and dismissed from the army. Because of his brilliant service with the Russian Legions and his magisterial activities in Siberia, no further action was taken against him. These events, however, induced ČOS to conduct energetic discussions about the political situation. In the autumn meeting of the central committee, a call went out to all citizens warning them of the danger. The call stated that fascism was a political movement which was a considerable danger to the freedom of the nation and was incompatible with concepts of Sokol in any totalitarian activity.

## TYRŠ HOUSE

An unexpected result of the VII Slet was the realization that ČOS needed its own building to provide space for its many activities. While most units had their own building, ČOS had been renting two rooms in the Palace Sylva Tarouk, near Wenceslaus Square. These rooms were renovated in 1889 but had long since proved inadequate. One of the rooms was used as the secretary's apartment and one as an office. ČOS did move to larger rooms within the Palace Sylva Tarouk, but even these proved inadequate. There was only one assembly room in the new quarters, which meant that one group had to wait until another group had finished before they could use the room. For twenty years, Sokol spokesman and founder of the Sokol Museum, Karel Vaníček, had tried to convince everyone that ČOS needed new facilities, and now, finally, it appeared the requirement would be fulfilled.

Many possible sites were surveyed for their suitability until finally an ideal site was found in the middle of Prague (Lesser Town) across the river from the National Theater. The site had Prague Castle in the background and was bordered on one side by the Vltava River and on a second side by Všeřdova Street next to the Malostranské school. On another side was Karmelitská Street, which contained an adjoining wall that was low, ugly and swollen from many years of wear and tear. It was so hideous that brother František Kudel, who was named as the administrator of the new hall, wanted it improved. He felt that such an abomination would not properly represent Sokol and that he could improve the situation if given a free hand. It took much discussion before brother Sokols who were specialists in such areas, could convince him of the historic value of the wall. It seemed that this wall was a rare historic keepsake which was one of two remaining renaissance walls

from old courtyards that were being preserved in Prague. The other similar keepsake is located by Prague Castle's Matias Brána (gate). So, the wall was saved. Sokol had been fortunate, not only in their selection of a site, but also in their selection of the individual who would oversee the wall restoration. Brother František Krásný was the individual selected and he approached his task with the love and tenderness of a lover. He studied every stone in the wall, and he learned from them the history of their use in buildings and of times past that had been both good and bad. In the past, there had been monasteries and convents which had been destroyed by the followers of Hus during the Husitě wars. The centuries had played havoc with the buildings and walls and left behind both ruins and devastation. The wall had such a reputation and occupied such an important part in the history of Prague that since the actual history was not enough, the people made up stories to satisfy their imagination. Some of these stories were captured in a book written by Jan Pelikán titled *Fairy Tales from Tyrš' House*.

On the lot purchased by ČOS were two well preserved buildings. One building was the palace of the former Count Vchynský (also known later as Kinský) and behind it, facing Čertovka Street, was the unfinished, but well-preserved, Count Michna Palace. This very rich army contractor wanted to out-do the splendor of the Malostranské Palace of the Duke from Valdstyn, but he died before the building was finished. The count's heirs decided not to finish the building, which consisted of a center section and one wing.

The last occupants of the buildings were members of the Austrian State Treasury Department which had converted the building into an arsenal, storehouse and workshop for repairing light weapons. Some of the modifications consisted of accommodations for male workers, blacksmith facilities and other repair shops. Unfortunately, they located these facilities in the most beautiful part of the palace, which subsequently became the main entrance to the Sokol Museum. In one corner of this beautiful area was a charming niche which was decorated with flowers. This niche had been remolded to include a fireplace by making a hole in the ceiling and connecting a pipe into the chimney to provide for a workman and for welding operations. As they repaired their weapons and searched for a place to hang rifles on the wall, if no racks were available, they knocked off pieces of the beautiful cornices which were located

throughout the building and made hanging racks out of the cornices. The first thing Brother Krásný did was order that all modifications were to be removed and all rubbish cleared from the building so that the building would be clean once again.

During cleaning of the grounds, many circles of soil, whose contents were different from the soil surrounding them, were found. The purpose of the circles was a mystery until one day, an old architect who was active in the construction of the building explained that the circles were former holes that had been used as toilets. Whenever a hole was filled, it was covered and another dug, which explained why there were so many of them. In the ground, they also found many "tear containers." These containers were little earthen vessels like those we received from Santa Claus when we were young girls. The vessels were used when a rich man died, and because a lot of crying was desired, the mourners who had no reason to cry would hire women to cry for them. The mourner gave these criers two containers for tears and paid them based on the quantity of tears they contained.

We, the young future staff of Tyrš House, were impatient to move into our new quarters. It seemed to us that the repairs were taking too long, but according to the specialists, they were proceeding quickly. Finally, in desperation, we asked Br. Krásný to vacate at least one room so that we could fill it with some furniture and use it for our meetings. He agreed to our request, but for light we brought candles and placed them on the mounds of dirt which we had to dodge as we made our way to the room. But we were happy because we were in our new home.

Some of the fairy tales about our new quarters concerned stories about a headless horseman and a white lady. I saw the white lady myself one evening on the second floor of the building at the end of a long passage, which connected the administrative offices with the gymnasium building. The passage had offices on one side and windows which faced Karmelitská Street on the other side. On the evening when I saw the white lady, I had been working late and there was no light in the passage. As I started down the dark passage, I saw the white lady standing in a recess in the wall. But, as I approached nearer, the lady disappeared. It was later discovered that a bachelor lived in one of the homes on Karmelitská Street that faced the passage windows. He usually returned home at 11 p.m. and turned on his lights, which reflected through the passage windows until he turned them off at

midnight. It is hard to say whether these lights were the origin of the white lady, but I do know these tales continued long after my experience. So, in all, the tales and the walls remain as evidence of the beautiful structure that once existed on the site of Tyrš House.

As the renovation of the buildings proceeded, it was found that some of the small interior spaces were the most difficult to convert for usable areas; however, Brother Krásný was able to solve these problems both expediently and economically.

The oldest and most memorable architectural features could not be changed, so they were converted into a part of the museum known as Karásek's gallery. The remaining rooms in the buildings were more easily converted into either offices or open areas. The one deficiency of the former Count Vchynsky building was the lack of adequate space needed to conduct the most important function of the Tyrš system, namely instructor training.

The facilities for the instructor schools needed to be modern, bright and contain the most advanced equipment to accommodate the large number of youngsters who were expected to attend this most important part of the Tyrš system. A solution was found when Brother Krásný reserved the central passageway leading from the Michna Building to the right-angle wing for the sole purpose of physical training. On the ground level of this area was the gymnasium, which, at that time, was the largest in the world. Above the gym was a room for a hostel and below the gym was an indoor swimming pool. This part of the building was adjacent to the instructor offices, which made access and contact very easy.

At the dedication ceremonies in 1923, parchment documents and memorial stones were placed into the foundation of the buildings which represented every Sokol District. The stones were from the following mountains: Říp, north of Prague and site of the first Czech settlement; Radhošt and Lysá peaks in the Moravian-Silesian Beskids; Kriváň in Slovakia's high Tatras; and Triglav, the highest mountain in Slovenia. Later, the Prague districts planted memorial trees on the summer gymnastic field.

To financially support this extensive Sokol center, the proceeds of one Slet was not enough. One major addition to the site was a large slate latrine to which the units and districts contributed their financial support. As a matter of fact, the units and districts, to offset expenses incurred by the VIII Slet, outdid themselves with their

contributions for the new buildings. I have forgotten to mention that some of these additions to the center included the purchase of another nearby palace and the former Schwarzenberg riding school. These new facilities were converted into a modern restaurant and a small hotel, where agents from the districts could be housed and fed when they came to Prague for meetings. Finally, the ČOS had a dignified facility to accommodate the full range of Sokol activities.

We thought that the ČOS site requirements would be adequate for at least a few generations, but Sokol growth outdid our most optimistic expectations. Very soon we had to rent additional facilities to house our committees that oversaw the Slets and provide for Slet preparations. A new group, called the Scheiner board, was created for the purpose of surveying all property for sale in the vicinity of the central buildings, so that additional property could be purchased in the central area. Once again growth had exceeded our expectations and we were in the market for additional expansion. A particular weakness in our facility was the inadequacy of our main gymnasium. The men claimed the gym was too small and the women decided it was inadequate for the special needs of women. Most of all, we were deficient in our need for a separate gymnasium for our women's schools.

Finally, when I was 50 years old, the administrative board of ČOS decided to build the gymnasium I had longed for. It was to be a gymnasium specifically designed to satisfy the special needs of women gymnasts. The board also allocated 2,814 crowns for the structure which was to be built on land previously purchased from the Choteck Palace. The son of the builder of the original Tyrš Home, Br. Krásný, Jr. along with another architect, developed the plans for the new building, but for the actual construction, Sokol would have to wait.

## CONTINUOUS INSTRUCTOR SCHOOLS

**EDITORIAL COMMENT.** This section of Provazníková's book underscores the emphasis of Tyrš' system. He considered well-trained instructors as the key to training. The idea included a step-by-step progression of skills in an atmosphere of brotherhood but one of a sense of advancement. He even encouraged the idea of friendly competition in the gymnasium. To encourage competition, as well as training for fitness, the system considered gender, age and ability. Over time there developed many misconceptions regarding Tyrš' objectives, e.g., that trainers should not be paid. In fact, many units, both in Europe and the US, employed full-time instructors.

It was a well-known fact that Tyrš' first concern in Sokol was the establishment and maintenance of a well-educated instructor staff. It was also well-known that before he suggested the establishment of the Gymnastic Association of Ladies and Girls of Prague, Tyrš had trained a well-prepared instructor staff. The weakness in the formal education of this staff, (here I am differentiating between education and training) was in its lack of ability to initially understand the impact of all its activities and efforts. Later, the strong emphasis on education of the physical training staff would be transferred to its pupils and characterized in all their activities.

Despite this big effort in education, it was not possible to establish an instructor's school for men before 1889 (which was five years after Tyrš' death). Then in 1902, a school for women was opened. Even by that time, it was only possible to initially conduct schools every other year and the units assumed full responsibility for the education of their instructional staff. They accomplished this task by reviewing the lessons taught by Tyrš so that this genius work would not have been in vain.

Continuing education of instructors was accomplished by conducting an instructor's class for 30 to 60 minutes following each adult men's class. During this extra period, a portion of the time was devoted to self-improvement and the remaining time was spent on formal education. This method of instructor education continued until the beginning of WWII and was a pre-requisite for both district and ČOS sponsored courses. The system was discontinued when the Sokol units became too small to support the program.

Dr. Tyrš was, himself, a highly educated man who was not satisfied with amateurism or inadequate instruction. Rather he believed that to educate an individual through training requires a highly educated instructor staff. He requested that the same high level of gymnastic skills displayed by the top 60,000 Sokols be matched by their understanding of the Tyrš system, and the terminology used therein, so they could correctly read the detailed descriptions of training in the various journals and handbooks. Moreover, he believed that the authors of those articles and handbooks and those who taught or assisted in the instructor's school required an education that was greater than that of the students they taught. This was deemed necessary if they were to correctly promote and execute training that was suitable for the gen-

der, age and individual abilities and level of training of the student.

The development and conduct of central training schools, which Tyrš so loved and strongly supported, was difficult to achieve during the first 60 years of the Sokol movement. Even in those places where there was a large Sokol facility, there was a lack of accommodations and facilities to properly house and feed the students. And yet, the central training school was considered an essential ingredient for the unity of the entire Sokol training program. Therefore, when courses could be conducted, they were of longer duration than now, as they lasted from four to six weeks and there were always an adequate number of men, and later women, who would leave their work to attend the classes.

The dire need to properly train Sokol instructors was an impetus for the building of Tyrš House. One of the first requirements in the new Tyrš House was the demand for rooms for the instructor school. The new facility made it possible to vastly expand the instructor program and by its centralization, regulate and standardize the training. The courses taught were divided into three categories: basic, intermediate and advanced. The basic level was geared to individuals that would help with instruction in the districts; the intermediate level for geared for individuals who would instruct the instructors; and the advanced level focused on individuals who would teach at high levels in the larger districts and at the highest gymnastic level. The advanced level of courses lasted six weeks.

The comprehensive instructional program in the Tyrš House required the employment of full-time, permanent teachers. The school's operation necessitated the hiring of a school director and female instructor for the women's school and a male instructor for the men's school. From the beginning, the courses were conducted jointly where possible, but separately when the instruction for men and women differed. In the men's courses, the emphasis was on movements primarily concerned with strength and with group activities, whereas in the women's courses, the emphasis was primarily on dancing, balance exercises and flowing movements. After a few years the school was divided into separate schools for men and women which made it possible for each group to broaden and add depth to the instructions.

The instructional and specialist courses taught at the schools were usually two to six weeks in duration. Later the six-week courses were divided into a winter and

summer semester of three weeks each. After the division of the six-week course unity was preserved by maintaining a joint director and by ensuring that the instructors were influenced by the same staff and research personnel. The school mission was enhanced when proceeds from Slets and other rental activities allowed ČOS to pay travelling expenses for instructors visiting units outside Prague. The traveling instructor's program provided a means for passing on the Sokol ideals, and to ensure that even the poorest units received the highest level of instruction by qualified instructors. Sokol members in a unit valued these advantages. Because the school taught courses throughout the year, it was possible to continually modify the instructional program to meet the changing climate in gymnastics. Provisions were made to add various sports to the program and to provide for suitable levels of effort that were commensurate with the various age groups. Despite these efforts to manage the schools and the courses taught therein, it soon became apparent that guidance and regulations would have to be provided from sources outside of the Tyrš House.

Sokol was not too prideful to search outside of its ranks and hire specialists that could enhance instructor knowledge and skills. Mostly, however, the required skilled persons were found within the organization. To assist the instructional staffs, we had a separate staff of highly skilled gymnasts in both the men's and women's schools. Each course in the schools set aside one-hour per day for special instruction by the special teams. This hour was designed to be in harmony with the regular instruction and was designed to further increase the skills of the individual student. We also selected the best graduate students and offered them further instruction to aid in their development. We had special sleeping quarters for women instructors; I also had a bedroom whenever I stayed overnight. The women's school functioned under my direction because I had been named director of this aspect of training. The work was of immense interest for me and I enjoyed it. Along with other team leaders, I spent many evenings discussing our mutual problems and seeking solutions, and then spending the night there, so we could get an early start the next morning.

The Tyrš House schools brought in many observers from clubs all over Europe, and it was my desire to also invite observers from America so we could have the closest cooperation. The purpose of this cooperation was to assure parallel development and progress of the Sokol

movement. In the US we always had a few travelling instructors because, whenever the Americans asked for help from the ČOS, we always sent our best instructors. The travelling instructors were always men, since, unfortunately, we had no women instructors to send. I wanted to be in contact with the American women instructors, especially those at the higher level, and my opportunity came in 1926.

Following the VIII Slet in 1926, we formed an instructor's school for the American women who participated as members of the American team. We also made the course available for some of our own gymnasts to establish a means of contacting selective students. Everything did not turn out as we anticipated, because the American women were not accustomed to our strict discipline requirements, and for coping with the amount of instruction we attempted to cram into a 14-day course. We further expected the Americans to improve their Czech language skills! However, that was not to be as they amused themselves by continuing conversing in English, which limited individual contacts. The lack of knowledge of the Czech language by the American sisters was not our only problem. We found they smoked too much, stayed up too late, were late to class, and basically did what they wanted to do. Naturally, we could not dismiss them from the course because we didn't want to disrupt a congenial relationship between the American and Czech Sokols. So, we closed our eyes to many of the infractions.

Because we were wise enough to relax our rigid standards for the Americans, I found that after 22 years many of these original students now held high positions in the American Sokol organizations. I remember that Bessy Erhard and Betka Molnárová, who, in the 70th year of Slovak Sokol, held some of the highest positions in their organization. In the American Sokol Organization, Kateřina Daňko and Božena Černá from Cleveland in 1969, taught the Indian Club composition from the XI Slet to a 24-member team, and they remain active in their organization. Appreciation of our instructor school was best exemplified by the very eloquent Emily Venclová who attended the VII Slet as a part of her honeymoon, and subsequently attended the school after the Slet. Imagine her surprise when she learned her groom had to reside in a hotel while she was required to live in the hostel for students. She was able to see her husband at dinner for two hours, and it appeared it did not hamper her too much. She was asked what her husband thought of the

separation, and she responded by saying he was of the same tough dough as she was. This was apparently true, for later he became editor of the Central District Paper of AOS.

If I complained about the lack of discipline by the American students, the opposite was true for one of our Polish students. For example, when I became acquainted with Jadwiga Countess Zamoyska, she was already President of the Polish Sokols. Without question, she ranked among the most conscientious and well-disciplined students in our school. One day, the manager of President Masaryk's office called me and wanted to know if I was so evil that I would not allow one of our students to visit the president. When I asked how he had come to this opinion, he explained that the President Masaryk had invited Countess Zamoyska for dinner and she had informed him that, unfortunately, she could not accept because the school students only had free time between 7 and 9 p.m. I had to put on my most severe face when I gave an order to sister Zamoyska to quickly write another letter accepting the invitation. This is an example of how the president of the Polish Sokol viewed Sokol equality.

At that time, Sister Zamoyska did not know how advantageous the instructor's school would be for her future career. Sometime later, after WWII, we did not meet again until the London 1948 Olympic Games. Both of us had left our native countries and were seeking a life in exile; she in Canada and I in the US. I confided that my future was now in college teaching under Dr. Margaret Brown, who was known to both of us. She was the American delegate to the International Federation of Gymnastics (FIG). Jadwiga had been the Polish delegate, while I represented Czechoslovakia. Sometime later, she wrote to me and asked me to confirm that she had studied at the instructor's school, which apparently was to her advantage in her new career. Dr. Brown advised me that because the school was only six weeks long, the Americans would tend to measure its effectiveness by its length. She suggested that I list the detailed course subjects which should be of value to Jadwiga's future education. It later became known that the information I provided saved her several semesters of study in physical education in one of Montreal's universities.

The high reputation of Sokol instructor schools was spread far and wide by our foreign students so that our student quota requests constantly grew. The students

came to study physical education in Czechoslovakia as the epitome of available education in that field. Before WWI in Russia, satisfactory completion of a ČOS instructor course was sufficient to qualify an individual to teach physical education in the public schools. Russia had more than 100 teachers who came directly from the Sokol instructor course to teach in their schools. When the Czar's government decided to introduce physical education into the military training schedule, they had to decide which system would be most valid for their use. They invited representatives from Sweden, Germany and Bohemia to demonstrate their systems. Sokol sent Franta Erben to describe the Sokol system. The representatives from the three countries were each allocated some classes to teach so that comparisons could be made. After one year, the results were compared, and it was found that the Sokol system taught by Franta Erben was the best. The Czar's government then introduced the Sokol system to the army and appointed Franta Erben a teacher in the military academy in Petrograd.

Something like the Russian experience also happened in Romania where King Karol, to raise the cultural standard in the State, ordered a reform of the entire school system. The government sent out specialists in education to study physical education in the various lands where it was most highly developed and found that Sokol physical education was best. Sokol President Miroslav Klinger, and I, as Director of Sokol Women, were invited to Romania for several days on a state visit and upon our return, we arranged for special courses for Romanian students to be taught in the French language at the Tyrš House school. More requests for traveling instructors came from the US. One of the instructors sent to America was Sister Slava, who is now a US resident. Much later, when Dr. Brown knew that I would not be returning to my native land after the Olympic Games in London in 1948, she offered me a position in the college where she served as president.

## **SPORTS**

**EDITORIAL COMMENT.** The Sokol Tyrš system was based on physical training that included self-discipline. It was a form of physical education that was adapted by schools. The system was based on gymnastics, including gymnastic competitions at various levels of ability. In the 1920s additional sports were added and are the topic of this section.

Following WWI, European countries displayed an intensive interest in all types of sporting activities. The principal foundation of all light athletic sports, such as track and field, as well as fencing and ball games, were included in the Tyrš system. Thus, there was no need to add anything new to these types of competition.

The Sokol gymnastics program incorporated all phases of mental, physical and moral aspects of training so that it was a well-balanced program designed for the healthy development of the individual. Unlike other specialized types of sporting activities, which thrived only on victories or records, Sokol's objective was on a higher plane.

Sports in Sokol activities was nothing new. On the contrary, sports in Bohemia and Moravia had their start in Sokol. The first contest in classic boxing occurred in 1890, while the athletic sports alliance was not started until eight years later. Different training objectives required different methods of instruction. For example, track and field events were frequently limited by space (the gymnastic facility itself) and such limitations brought about many innovative modifications. When it was impossible to have a long starting run for a vault, modifications, which I've now forgotten, were implemented to compensate for the shortage. Even in my childhood in our gymnasium, we were trained in pole vaulting by using a pole whose point was placed into a box of soft wood to prevent damage to the gymnasium floor. We jumped from the balcony onto a canvas held by other gymnasts, and we jumped from a bounce onto a steep bridge, which propelled us up to one or two meters above the ground. We also performed flowing jumps, triple jumps and any other innovation we could think of within the space available.

Before the end of WWI, the exercises performed by Sokols generally adhered to the principles of the Tyrš system. However, after the War, when the windows to the outside world opened and all forms of sporting events became known, our Sokol juniors became very interested in these sports. That generation of juniors had grown up in Sokol and now wanted more sports incorporated into the Sokol program. Against this demand, the older generation of Sokol stood firm, for they understood the Tyrš system as a training program rather than a sporting activity (except for gymnastics competition). The debates over the changes were generally championed by sides separated by the generation gap. The youth

stood firm against the elders, but as they had been our teachers, we respected them. On the other side, the older generation knew if they did not make some changes, they would lose the younger generation and the future of Sokol. I will never forget the moment when in one meeting a deeply touched Agathon Heller stated, "You are now telling us that what we did in our lives was wrong and what you want to start now is something new which is, perhaps, better."

The discussion convinced me to defend the juniors. I said to Br. Heller, "No Brother, you do not understand us. We respect what you gave to us as the Tyrš legacy, and we are grateful for it. Additionally, we are fully willing to save it all; but we would also like to add the new discoveries to the old system as we feel it would be completely in harmony with the Sokol program."

The leader of the youth activities and a member of the board was Karel Heller, who was 15 years older than I, but who had the same advantage I had by having teenage juniors at home. This advantage gave us immediate access to the youth's opinion and their rationale for the position taken by the Sokol youth. I spent much time with Karel Heller discussing how we could integrate the two viewpoints and still maintain harmony. Together we stood in the center of the conflict at all informal discussions of the controversy until finally, we thought we were ready to present a position to the entire board.

I attended my first committee meeting of ČOS, as new board member. I was very conscious of my lack of knowledge of board procedures, so, naturally, I was as quiet as a mouse. It was a meeting of the entire board, and it was chaired by President Scheiner using full ceremonial procedures. In attendance were representatives from all districts who were thoroughly familiar with their jobs and with their responsibilities. Everyone was deeply engrossed in their task of negotiations when suddenly, without a reason or explanation, I arose and walked out of the room. Why I did such a thing I have no idea, as it was as though I was in a trance. Upon leaving the room, I turned down the hall and there, through an open door to the former editor's office, I saw Br. Karel Heller sitting at a table. I stopped at the door and tried to realize what I was doing there. He turned and when he saw me, he became as white as chalk and whispered, "I was thinking of you." That seemed to awaken me, and I immediately knew that he was not prepared to pres-

ent his report, which was the reason he was not in the meeting. He explained to me that he was at a point in his report where he did not know how to proceed and was wondering what I would say about it. He thought that he should have Provazníková here as she discussed this point, understood it and would know how to present it. This was his thought when he saw me at the door. After we discussed the point, he made his presentation, and his recommendation was accepted. The solution regarding sports and the Tyrš system had been found and satisfied everyone; the idea was to form a section for supplemental training for those individuals who were interested in activities which could not be performed on a gym floor.

### ***Swimming***

When it was decided to build Tyrš House, the women's board of instructors requested that the swimming pool be covered so it could be used for instruction during the entire year. We also began preparing for its use by including swimming instruction in all the instructor classes. Although some of the instructors had received advanced training in swimming instruction from our institute for the education of physical training professors, we did not consider ourselves qualified to teach the subject. We, therefore, requested help from a brother instructor, Wiedermann, who previously taught swimming in the military service. He trained us and our student instructor students, a position he held for many years. He was an outstanding teacher who prepared our staff to teach swimming before the Tyrš House opened. As soon as the swimming instruction began, it was incorporated into all the classes, and it did not stop there. Soon we also arranged to train the Prague Sokol girls and then progressed to training adults and added diving to the list of activities we taught. The experience we gained was put into practice throughout our districts and through improvements in the teaching methods we used in our instructor schools.

### ***Skiing—Sokol Mountain Cottage***

Skis and skiing have been used in our lands as a means of transportation between isolated villages for many years. Even on our first tour to Krkonoše (now a national park on the Polish border) we would sometimes meet women from the mountains dressed in their pleated skirts on skis and using only one pole. As a sport, skiing started to spread at the beginning of the 20th century. In

Sokol, we did not hear too much about the sport except for the individual groups who traveled to the mountains in winter. I started to ski when a small group from Karlin Sokol challenged me to join them on a skiing outing. We travelled to some low hills where they helped me attach my skis and instructed me to do as they did. These instructions were easy to give but difficult to follow as I soon found out after numerous falls, soaked gloves, and frozen hands. This initial difficult experience did not dissuade me. On the contrary, it gave me the perception that skiing could be taught differently in Sokol. Later, when skiing was incorporated into the Sokol program, we taught skiing in the same way as we taught other skills, i.e., by first educating the instructor staff. The instructors were enlightened as to a systematic approach to teaching skiing to beginning students and this system was later introduced throughout the districts and unit. The big difference between our Sokol instruction and the ski alliances was that the alliances wanted a finished skier who was trained for competition, whereas, we had a different goal. Sokol's objective was the training of the whole person, as exemplified in the basic physical training program. This is the reason that we were outdone by the alliances, which produced many highly talented skiers who could compete at a higher skill level than our students.

To improve my daughter's skill in skiing, I began teaching her myself. My husband had no interest in any type of sports, so I took Alena on skiing trips where we were accompanied by some of our brother and sister Sokols. Of course, this arrangement did not satisfy Alena because of the lack of friends her age. But this problem was solved in a short time. My friend, Anda Ebnerová had two sons a little younger than Alena and because Anda's husband had a heart condition and could not ski, I adopted the boys, not only for skiing, but also for other sports. Karel Heller had almost the same situation in his house as he did not have much free time, because he was employed full time by Sokol, and his wife, Bela had a heart condition and could not ski. So, I also added his son and daughter to my little family for sports, which had now grown to five children. Bela Heller had also been my student in gymnastics.

Sometimes we took another student with us on our ski trips, so I quickly became known because of the swarm of children I always had with me. If anyone would inquire if I was in Krkonoše, there was always someone

to say, "I saw a swarm of children on Fox Mountain, so Sister Provazníková must be there too." Because of the size of our group, it was not always easy to find lodging, especially before our big holidays. I remember one time when we walked into our usual lodging, we were told that all rooms were occupied. The owner sent us to a Mrs. Kraus, but not to look for her by name, but by a sign which read Kraus Butter and Cheese. When we arrived, we found that all her rooms were also occupied so we went to a second and a third Mrs. Kraus before we were finally accommodated. I was soon of the opinion that all people in Krkonoše were German and were named Kraus. This experience taught me a lesson. In Krkonoše we met with other groups of brothers and sisters and together we agreed that Sokol should have its own cottage. While the cottage could be a small simple cabin, it should be adequate for us to stay overnight, and the lodging should be affordable.

### ***Mountain Cottage***

We heard that a cable railway, the first in Bohemia, was to be built in Černy Vrch (Black Hill) near Janské Lazně (spa). So, we went to see it. We were fascinated by the site. Next to the future end station of the cable railway was a large meadow eminently suitable for use as a practice field and with a splendid view of one-quarter of the entire province of Bohemia. We immediately decided we had to have this place for ourselves, but I stopped the thought. It was such a beautiful place, but for only for a few people, and it would be wasted. But as a place for Sokol, it would be ideal. I felt that here we had to build something to serve all Sokols and to function as a base for instructor schools, for use by our Sokol youths, and even a place where needy children could come to enjoy and benefit from the environment. I was determined that Sokol purchase the area.

At the next ČOS board meeting, I sat next to President Scheiner and revealed my plan to him. I suggested that a cottage should be built by Sokol members for ČOS, but the President had other views. He thought that ČOS had to work for all units and districts equally. Because this cottage would serve only Krkonoše and the Prague districts, the other districts would soon want the same facilities. ČOS should not show partiality for any single district. Sadly, I made my way to the Secretary, who said to me, "The president is right. Such a cottage would have to

be built by Prague's five districts. So why don't you go to them with your proposal?"

Prague's five districts had undertaken many joint projects, so a special association had been created with each district taking a turn providing the leaders for the organization. This year, the leader was Adolf Němeček, who was not only a skier, but also long-time Sokol who had sympathy for my cause. He informed me that he could not decide himself, but that he would have to obtain the concurrence of all five districts. So, I visited the districts and obtained their concurrences for a Sokol mountain cottage which would be shared equally by all five districts. It was also decided that smaller shares could be purchased by individuals which would give them priority rights for accommodations based on their membership. I thought I had won my cause, but alas, it was not that easy. The Prague Association decided there should be an administration committee made up of one or two representatives from each district. These representatives knew the limits to which they could commit their district to the project and any special needs of their skiers. Each of the representatives had other functions for which they were responsible and none of them were willing to undertake the responsibility of coordinating the construction of the Sokol Cottage. Finally, it became apparent that if the cottage was to be built, I would have to be responsible for the project. Thus, I was designated secretary for the building of a cottage high in the mountains and far from Prague with no idea what the obstacles would be.

The obstacles became apparent at our first meeting; we needed a place from which we could operate, provide transportation to the site and raise money. Almost all Krkonoše was owned by one old aristocratic family. Surprisingly we were quickly able to reach an agreement with the family. To Sokol, they quickly agreed to release the area that I had designated on a map, and when I asked the price, the old man answered, "For Sokol, no price." That resolved one problem, but the problem of transportation was another matter. The mountain was between 12 and 14 hundred meters high (about 3,900 feet) and contained one narrow access road to our property. For a large portion of the year, because of mud and snow, the road was almost undrivable. The budget for transportation of building material and furnishings and later for maintenance reached high numbers. Finding a means

of getting material and people to the construction site became a problem.

Next to the Sokol site, a cable railway and station was being built the and to help in its construction, a provisional cable rail for the transportation of material was erected. This facility was being built by the ministry of national defense, perhaps, as the first phase in fortifying the border. Brother Karel Heller introduced me to the minister of National Defense, who was a Sokol member, to allow me to request his assistance. The minister unhesitatingly gave his consent to allow the troops transporting material for the end station to also transport the material for the Sokol Cottage. While that problem was resolved, there remained the problem of money.

Because the period was just after the end of WWI, most of Europe was impoverished and recovery was very slow. Fortunately, we had many volunteers to help with needed tasks. An official in the office of the Secretary of Sokol helped us after his normal working hours by writing some much-needed letters and the Sokol press gladly published news items in their newspapers to help maintain interest in our project. In the end, the money was cheerfully donated to the project. Now the biggest burden became obtaining timely approvals by official authorities and the completion of a suitable road to the cottage site.

On one occasion, I was travelling on the road to the site with a district leader who needed to personally validate something on the site. We traveled by car to the beginning of the cable rail site, and I asked him if he wanted to travel the remaining way by foot up the muddy road or ride the make-shift cable line, which was being used to transport material. He looked at the cable with a great deal of mistrust because it was not intended for the transport of passengers. It consisted of a wooden platform on a strong iron hook hanging on a rope which travelled above the trees to the end station site. The leader did not like the thought of tramping up the muddy road, so finally, with a great deal of reluctance, he chose to go by cable. When we were high above the trees, the cable stopped so we had to sit on our board and wait. There was no telephone or other means to communicate with the machine shop, and they did not know our situation. After a very long period, out of boredom, I took a small mirror from my purse to rearrange my hair, which had become tangled from the wind. My travelling

companion immediately became concerned that I might fall, exclaimed, "What are you doing? Hold yourself!" Naturally, I obeyed, and he continued by suggesting that I look down at the pile of crumbled bricks which had fallen from the lift. After that, I maintained my hold on the hook.

In the end, the cottage was built. But I still encountered the biggest obstacle to my plans. My view was that the cottage should be simple, plain and that fees should be affordable for juniors, and serve as a school for Sokol students. Brothers who represented powerful factions in the districts had other opinions. When they saw the potential in our site and building and how much money we raised, they started to talk about a mountain lodge for Sokol and that was the way it was completed. The lodge was opened in 1928 and it accommodated the instructor schools and served as a hostel for our juniors, so the original objective for a cottage was achieved. Unfortunately, we were not masters of the facility very long, because of the Munich agreement that allowed the Sudetenland to be annexed to Germany. These events led to the take-over of the "Sokol Cottage" by the officers of the Nazi SS. In 1945, it was returned to Sokol for a few years, but who uses it now in the communist regime is a big question. I do believe that one day it will be returned to Sokol. Skiing was made a part of the VIII Slet and progressed in importance so that by 1948, it was the mainstay of winter sports in Czechoslovakia.

**EDITORIAL COMMENT.** The end of the Czechoslovak Republic was triggered by the events of 1938 and 1939, the first of which was the Munich Agreement signed by Germany, Italy, Great Britain and France on September 29, 1938. The agreement allowed Hitler's Germany to annex the Sudetenland, a northern section of Czechoslovakia bordering Germany, based on the rationale that many Germans lived there. However, Hitler's plans were more ambitious, and six months later, on March 15, 1939, he declared Bohemia and Moravia a German Protectorate, and Slovakia a separate country. Provazníková provides many details about Sokol members' activities during the war years, especially after Sokol was outlawed in 1941. She indicates the role Sokol members played in Jindra, the Sokol resistance organization, and her own numerous experiences during the war years.

### **Excursions**

Along with the industrial and technical development following WWI, people felt a need to return to nature as

demonstrated by their increased interest in excursions and camping. While it is true that excursions were an early part of the Sokol program, later they were used for other purposes. For example, on some of the excursions, a speaker explained the purpose of Sokol, and this was generally followed by an exhibition or drill. Following the program, applications for membership in local Sokol units were distributed to the crowd. Other excursions were made to historic or natural beauty sites, but the purpose remained the same. The goal was to promote the Sokol movement. In that period of limited information channels, the excursion process was a significant help in Sokol development and certainly contributed to its rapid growth. In later years and particularly during periods of increased danger, excursions were used to inform the membership of common goals and member responsibilities and duties to Sokol and the country. To assist in this effort, the Sokol women's leadership issued a handbook which gave directions on preparing and leading excursions. Other portions of the handbook included songs, patriotic expressions, sayings, tips on scientific facts and guidance on approaching potential members.

### **Camping**

When Professor Antonín Svojsík, a member of Sokol, decided to organize scouting in Bohemia, he turned to the leaders of Sokol with a suggestion that they incorporate scouting within the Sokol Program. As far as I remember, his suggestion was not accepted. The main concern of Jindra Vaníček and the older Sokol brothers was that Sokol itself needed much organizational work without worrying about incorporating scouting into the program. In addition, it was felt that camping was its own topic. So, in the end, Professor Svojsík's suggestion was rejected. A few years later a few women tried to start a Girl Scout program in Sokol. Mrs. Bromislava Herbenová was the initiator and she convinced me to attend several of the initial meetings, but I soon also arrived at the same conclusion as the men. Currently, the war was not yet over. I was still completing my education and I had a small child and my work in Sokol. To start something brand new seemed to require too many things at one time.

My priority at that time was to fully understand Sokol. Once I was satisfied with this aspect of my knowledge, I could then think about how scouting could be

incorporated into the Sokol Program. It was clear to me that to try to connect these two programs was impractical. I felt that Sokol did not need scouting, nor did we need the working meetings and other hand-made activities to which scouting is dedicated. In Sokol we could hold the children together through their activities on the gym floor. My approach was to select from scouting the activities that would be good for Sokol and allow them to be integrated into the Sokol program.

Shortly after the end of WWI, I bought a home-style tent from war surplus that the Americans were selling in Europe. I didn't know exactly what to do with it, but later I was able to interest my daughter and some of her friends from Smichov Sokol regarding the possibility of camping during vacations in our surrounding areas. With this group, I travelled to Světlá Nad Sázavou, a town in the Bohemian-Moravian Highlands, where we discovered a splendid corner of the woods near a river. There the others were hunting or fishing, the kingfishers were flying about, and even a fox sometimes flitted through the area. It appeared to me that it was an ideal camping site for the junior Girls.

Scout founder and Sokol Antonín Svojsík and one of my colleagues had advised us how to erect my tent and when we did, it was done faultlessly. However, we had no sooner erected the tent than it started to rain, and continued to do so the entire week we were there. Unfortunately, Brother Svojsík had not cautioned us against touching the inside of the tent when it rains, so we had water dripping into the tent which we had to catch with a small cup. While this made conditions a little better, it didn't help too much as it continued to rain hard without stopping. The experience was of some good because it taught us how to survive under very difficult field conditions. When the week was over, I hurried over to the nearest scout camp to learn more about living in the outdoors. At the camp I met some of my friends who had attended some of the same scout meetings I had and found they were there to also learn. We discovered how to live comfortably in the outdoors and what things to do and what to avoid.

Teaching camping became a regular subject in our Sokol program. First, we taught instructors in our instructor schools so they, in turn, would be able to teach the new subject in their districts. The first course was taught in 1929 on Střelecký Island on the Vltava River in Prague, which was at that time the favorite camping site in

Bohemia, and there was room for everyone. Sometimes the brothers and sisters from the board of ČOS would visit us to view the training and evaluate the new addition to our training program. Our first attempt at teaching the camping subject taught us that fourteen days was not adequate to properly cover the subject. The students came to us as complete novices in camping, so we developed a two-stage program. In the first year we taught two classes who returned the following year to erect our campsite and continue their training. Meanwhile, the new students would devote their time to learning the basic camping skills and living in the camp erected by the previous year's students. The new students then had to take down the campsite at the end of their training program and ensure that the site had been returned to its original condition.

The remarkable expansion of our camping program was due in part to a film produced by Br. Fleischman, who made the film for our camp site and training program. The screenplay had been well prepared during a period when the sun was shining, so we had light. The film was on two reels and Fleischman was satisfied that the film was a good representation of our training.

Once we were visited by a few canoeists from Smichov Sokol. Seeing our camping site, they pleaded with us not to demolish it but rather let them arrange a camping weekend for their Sokol group. They promised that after the weekend, they would pack up the equipment and leave everything in order at the site. We complied with their request, and they paid us for the privilege of using the equipment. When we returned to Prague, we learned from Br. Fleischman's employees that one of the two reels of film had inadvertently been overexposed and was worthless. In the absence of Br. Fleischman, they asked me to help reshoot a second reel once again. The request was not a simple thing to grant, because the sisters had departed for their home districts. In the Smichov unit in Prague, I was able to find a few sisters willing to spend a pleasant weekend at our campsite, so we could remake the second part of the film. While Br. Fleischman did not charge us for the film, it proved to be a good advertisement for our camping program.

Unfortunately, our campsite on Střelecký Island did not last very long, because there was too much other activity to ensure the peace and privacy our school needed. We found a unique site for a new school in a

valley. The valley had its beginning deep in the Křivolát region in central Bohemia, which contained some romantic ruins. It had plenty of flowers and was isolated enough that it was seldom visited by tourists. There we again built our little village and equipped it with a kitchen and a flagpole. Year after year our demands for expansion grew and our site was enlarged.

### **Water Sports**

In the period between the two world wars, the sports of canoeing and rowing became popular. Rowing, because it is distinct from all other types of Sokol activities, never became popular within the family of Sokol members. Canoeing and kayaking, on the other hand, became very popular with Sokols because it was very closely related to the well-liked activities of traveling and camping.

### **FOREIGN CONTACTS**

When Tyrš first developed Sokol as a tool for obtaining our independence, he realized that because of our small size, we would need many allies if we were to be successful. From the beginning of the movement, the Sokol concept spread rapidly to many areas and other nations, particularly throughout the Slavic community, which included people with similar languages and culture. Our Sokol concept also spread to France and to our relationships with French gymnasts. The first major trip that ČOS made after WWI was to a meeting in France. During the Whitsuntide period in 1921, the French gymnasts held a convention in Alsasko, a French historical region bordering Germany and Switzerland that was returned to France after the war; Sokol participated in their convention.

In France, I was tempted to compete in the gymnastic competitions, but because of my role as the youngest instructor in our group, I decided to forego the individual competition and concentrate my efforts on my instructional responsibilities. My decision was also influenced by the fact that I was still a member of the Karlin Sokol club and after moving to Smichov I had not been able to devote the necessary time to learning my routines. Besides, I considered myself to be less capable than some of our other competitors. For the competitions, I was entrusted with leading one of our women's teams. Our women's group consisted of 24 gymnasts who were required to perform in the entire program of competi-

tion. This group was divided into three teams for performance on the various apparatuses. I was responsible for the team that was to perform on the beam and parallel bars, and with Indian clubs.

Upon completion of the congress, our countrymen drove us to the Arras battlefield where a troop of the "Nazdar" Brigade, a unit from World War I, had been positioned. There we finally saw the horrors of war. For as far as we could see, there was not a patch of green. The land looked as though it had been turned upside down and the bowels were left exposed to the light. Even after the long period since the end of the war, life had still not returned to the land. Elsewhere, they took us to a field where bones of men not yet buried could be seen between the flowers of overgrown red poppies. No one knew how many unknown soldiers still lay there. In the cemetery nearby, they told us there were 10,000 white crosses placed in neat straight lines. I thought that the same number of crosses was the same number of participants in our Slet just one year ago.

During a short trip to Paris, I soon realized my limitations as a French interpreter. When it came to shopping, all our sisters quickly learned how to speak without using either French or Czech. By illustrating their message through use of hand gestures and body movements, they were quickly able to impart their message and obtain what they wanted. When it came to paying for their purchases, they dumped the contents of their purse on the counter and the salesclerk picked out the needed money. Our worse problem came when we returned to our accommodation in the evening. In France, particularly in the war-ravaged areas, there was a lack of accommodations, even worse than in our own country, which had been spared the wreckage of war. They accommodated us in barracks which had been built for refugees relocated from the war territory. While the barracks were clean, when the first gymnast came back from the toilet, she complained she did not know how to use the facility. Naturally, we all went over to look, and we were dumbfounded at what we saw. The facility consisted of two footrests and a hole into which water flowed. I learned later from Br. Snížek, when we were in exile that this type of facility was already an institution in France when Caesar first came from Gaul with his soldiers. Frenchmen kept them as a historic memory.

After the public exhibition in the Paris ward of Saint

Mande, we began our preparations for the return trip. All were well prepared until we reached the German town, Kehl on the French border. There we were informed that in accordance with a new order in Germany, no through trains were authorized on Sundays, only excursion and local trains. Kehl is a very small city, and our group exceeded a hundred people so at best, accommodations would be difficult to find. We had two choices, we could either spend the night waiting in the station, or we could use the local trains to assist us in reaching our destination.

Jindra Vaníček, Sokol Director who supported a women's role in the Sokol organization, decided on the second alternative as he did not relish inactivity. By morning, we arrived at Nuremberg after some fourteen changes in transportation. It seems we travelled by almost every means available. We rode on fast trains, slow trains, second class, third class, and even cattle cars, where we sat on benches that were anchored to the car's walls. No wonder, when we reached Nuremberg, we were completely exhausted and all we wanted to do was sleep. Fortunately, our group leaders were able to obtain some clean, empty rooms where we spread out our capes and, using our suitcases as pillows, we went to sleep.

Out of our entire group, there were only two people who were relatively fresh, Br. Vaníček and I. During the night at stops where there was a little delay, Br. Vaníček and I would visit the bathrooms and refresh by splashing water on ourselves. The first fresh person that we saw the following day was Sister Markéta Vachtlová, who offered our group a tour of the city. A few joined the party, and she led us around Nuremberg in the magic moonlight. The moon was exactly above the castles, and it looked like a picture post-card. The sight left us with a deep emotion. When we returned to the train station, I was reproached by a brother, who, during the entire trip from Kehl to Nuremberg, had attended to all my needs, including making a bed for me from his coat and always finding me a place in a corner. When we arrived in Nuremberg, he was so tired that he went to sleep. Now, upon our return from sightseeing, he was upset because we had not taken him with us. Naturally, I felt obliged to him and offered to return to the city and show him the sights. He agreed to a tour and along with some others we went into Nuremberg a second time. These are my last memories of Germany shortly after WWI.

### ***Yugoslavia***

Our second excursion in 1921 was a visit to our nearest friends, the South Slavs. With them we enjoyed our best relationship. During the summer, there were excursions to Dalmatia on the Adriatic Sea, which we called our sea because we had so many students from that vicinity studying at Prague University. On our 1921 trip, we traveled to Bosna-Osierk. On the day before our state course in gymnastics training in Nymburg ended, our best undergraduate said to me, "Why is it that after living through three wars, I find I am afraid of participating in rope skipping using the type where a long circling rope is used."

Some of the participants from the course registered to go on an excursion into Yugoslavia after the course ended. Some of the South Slavs also agreed to go on the excursion. When it came time for me to say my farewells, the foreign students protested. One lady said, "You cannot do this to us. I promised to introduce you to my son and if I don't, you will ruin my reputation." I acknowledged that this was a good reason, and I promised to go, but I had no visa to enter the country. Somehow the boys smuggled me over the border. How they did, I still don't know. In Zagreb, I was introduced to her entire family. The mother of the family explained to me what it means to a South-Slav husband-partisan and head of the family to have to listen to a woman.

In Yugoslavia, which for centuries had been threatened by Turkey, there existed patriarchal traditions even deeper and stronger than in our own country. Therefore, women's emancipation progressed slowly and encountered many obstacles. Sokol stood at the forefront in the drive for women's equality and by far outdistanced all other groups in the nation. Additionally, or maybe because of it, the warm fraternization of Southern Slavs and Czechoslovaks was continuing.

### ***Denmark***

Upon my return to Prague, I had just enough time to change suitcases and I was on my way again. This time to Denmark where I had a scholarship to study new directions in Swedish physical culture.

During my trip I passed through Berlin, where I was given lodging and then discovered the bed linens had not been changed. Because there were only a few hours to morning, I spent the time slouching through the night in a chair. This first trip to Germany proved

to be more adventurous than normal. At the train station, a young man came to me and asked if I was on my way to Hamburg. When I answered in the affirmative, he grabbed my suitcase and ran to a train which was standing in a place which was different than I expected. I thought he was a porter and naturally I ran after him. He jumped into the rail car, found a place for me, placed my suitcase in the rack and ran out before I had a chance to pay him. After a short time, the conductor announced that an international thief had been spotted leaving our car and he asked if anyone had seen him or knew if he had arrived with anyone. Apparently, he wanted to board the international fast train, but he saw someone who recognized him, so he ran to escape. I calmly sat down and immediately fell asleep. But a fellow passenger shook me awake and said, "Do not sleep, someone will steal from you." I winked and slept again, but it was not a calm night.

In Denmark, I arrived on an island where I spent the night, and the following morning, to another island where the city of Ollerup is located and has a gymnastics school. I was welcomed in the school by several young Danish girls, who, much to my astonishment, did not know that Czechoslovakia existed or where it was located. But when I mentioned Prague, they realized its location. Then, when I explained that their Queen Dagmar had been a Czech Princess, I became their friend. We still have, in our family, a small golden cross which they gave me as a keepsake. The school director welcomed me to the course and surprised me when he told me that the Swedish Director of Physical Education wanted to talk to me. He introduced me to him, and I was told that he was anxious to talk to someone from Prague, because last year the Swedish newspapers had published some fantastic reports about some exercises in Prague which he considered to be fables. I asked what was so unbelievable. He replied that it concerned the report indicating that on a field there were several hundred people performing the same drill at the same time. That was not true, I said, it wasn't several hundred, it was ten thousand. We were speaking in German, but we switched to French and finally English. This was because he was trying to make sure he fully understood what I was saying. Fortunately, I had a few photographs with me which depicted the mass drills from the Slet. He took the photographs, located a magnifying glass, and set about counting the rows both

horizontally and perpendicularly and came to the ten thousand total. From that moment on, I couldn't get rid of him as one question followed another. "How could we line them up? How did we control them? How did we tell them what they were supposed to do? How did they learn the exercise. Where did they come from?" He did not understand how we could have such clear terminology so that even in the small villages they could learn from simple descriptions and perform so correctly and precisely. He also did not understand that each participant and gymnast had to pay their own expenses, travel, lodging and food and that every member of Sokol contributed to the building of the field. To him, it was totally unbelievable.

I reminded him of our first conversation in which I explained that we were not only a gymnastics union, but also an educational union. We use physical training to not only educate the human physically, but mentally and morally as well. He asked me, "What does a somersault have to do with morals?" Now I could explain that our Slets demonstrated the results of this education.

After my introduction, I became acquainted with the other female participants of the course. One of them was an Irish woman who became highly insulted when I considered her an English woman and yet, she thought that Czechoslovakia was a Balkan state. She had little interest in the course and was aloof from her fellow participants. As a matter of fact, she was as blasé as our perception of an English woman. Once she asked without expression, "Somewhere here there is a Sokol. Do you know anything about it?" When I told her I was a Sokol, she became very enlivened and wanted to know all about it. She wanted to know how we handled Sokol and achieved the results she had read about in her newspapers. On another occasion, when I finished first in a running race, I heard someone call out "Nazdar, Sokol. Nazdar!" Naturally I went to find out who in the crowd knew about Sokol and I discovered a lady teacher who had visited the Slet in Prague the previous year and had recognized the uniform. She was curious about my program in Denmark. When she heard that I would still be there for several more days and that I had no accommodation she offered me her flat. "Here are the keys to my flat," she said. "I am leaving on a longer trip, but someone should be there to take care of you and when you decide to leave, put the keys in the mailbox." Such was the trust of Sokols shown abroad.

Following the end of the course, Nilse Bukha, who emphasized motion in gymnastics helped us add this concept of the Finnish teacher to our teaching. Her idea was to add to the Swedish physical training, something from the Dalcroze method which teaches concepts of rhythm via movement. Her main point was to add a musical accompaniment to every training session. The violinist couldn't seem to satisfy her because she wanted something lighter and more uplifting. Finally, she tried to precentor a melody for him and lo and behold, it was one of ours. The name of the song was: "Dolls were walking on the road." Naturally, I was curious where she heard the song, and she told me it was in Finland. It seemed that when the Russian Czar visited the military garrison at a nearby city, the military band, which was mostly Czechs, played these songs so she learned their tunes.

In my class at Minerva, I had a colleague who had a writing talent. Although that school prohibited freedom of expression, this colleague, who wrote under a pseudonym as early as our third year of high school, published a few books. By the fifth year, a newspaper was publishing articles written by her. In contrast to her ability in writing, whenever I was required to write an article, I spent a lot of time chewing my pencil and then finally producing a half-page article which, in the end, was adequate to see me through.

My travels for Sokol ceased to be recreational rest periods between sessions of hard work, because when the trip was over, others could rest, whereas I had to compile a written record of my activities. This feeling of heavy commitment bore strongly upon me during my trip to Brno on the tenth anniversary of the Sarajevo assassination, which disrupted our 1914 Slet. Standing behind me at the time was Br. Krejci who pulled on my sleeve; and with Br. Havel, who wrote about me in the paper, guided us to a car waiting behind the stands. We proceeded to the "People's News" editor's office, which was located on Bohemian Street, to an office where the editor's servant had prepared some coffee in an iron pot. This coffee was the best I had ever tasted. Br. Krejci, with great pride, then showed me their newest acquisition, a teleprinter. Never in my life have I felt more honored than when I stood before this wonderful instrument of technology. Then, the servant brought me coffee, paper and pens and I knew my work had just begun, while the

others adjourned to the wine cellar for some singing of Moravian and Slovak songs. Very slowly, Br. Krejci had trained me not only to write a report of my trip experiences, but also to complete the report right after the event. This meant I had to complete the article and place it on the first train to Prague.

In 1928, I led the women' section our expedition to Strasburg, Germany. On this trip, my duties were many-fold, as I had to arrange all aspects of the expedition for the women. I had something to do all day long, and in the evening, we had to leave the Academy before the program ended to catch the express train from Paris to Prague, which passed through Strasburg at 1:00 a.m. We caught a taxicab to the railroad station where we went to the coffee shop for coffee, paper and pens, and I began writing my report. I continued to write until someone announced that the train was approaching. I quickly placed my report in an envelope, detoured around the attendant who was collecting train tickets and called back that I would pay later and cried out for someone to take the envelope to the editor's office. Somehow, there was always someone available to take or mail the report to its destination. This experience illustrates how well Br. Krejci had trained me.

Br. Krejci's training continued and as communications improved, so did my methods of filing my reports. I learned to write faster and I'm sure my reports also improved. I was also able to enjoy some sightseeing and visiting various areas of interest, such as museums and even had time to converse with our host gymnasts. I learned from them their instructional methods and their opinions, which were certainly different than ours. On each trip I learned something new. My horizons were constantly being widened and my field of work was broadened. It's strange to say, but despite the heavy workload, there was always time for everything. Oh well, we were young.

**EDITORIAL COMMENT.** Marie Provazníková's travels provide several important findings regarding the Sokol movement. First, she was always seeking ways to improve the Sokol's training program. Second, foreigners recognized that the Sokol Tyrš program was unique and featured mass calisthenic drills that were beyond the expectations of physical fitness leaders in other countries. Finally, other groups were interested in the Sokol training and its effects on the mind and soul.

## **FROM LETNA TO STRAHOV**

The Slet field at Letna was the site of the third through seventh Slets. The first Slet was at Prague's Střelecký Ostrov (Island) and the second Slet was on a preserve at the Vltava River, sites that could no longer accommodate the numerous participants. Accordingly, ČOS began searching for a site which could support Sokol Slets in the foreseeable future. Together with the Department of Physical Education, ČOS sought to locate an area that could be used not only for athletic events, but also for other activities, e.g., military parades. Working together on the problem, they located a useless and ugly plain and decided to build the new field, behind Strahovský Klášter (Strahov Monastery) located in the Strahov district of Prague. The site contained a clay-stone topsoil, and the surface was undulating and covered with an insignificant layer of nourishing soil, which provided pasture for goats. On the site were some rocks in which were located some habitable caves, used as homes for the poorest of the poor. I cannot remember exactly how the final agreement was worded. I believe the State bought the ground and ČOS committed itself to building the field, stadium, auditorium, and the dressing rooms. The agreement provided the use of the facility by us and other organizations. The site would require a large volume of earth to be moved if we were to have a level field.

The Ministry of Physical Education, through its chairman Br. Augustin Očenášek, hired an engineer surveyor, who was a fugitive from Ukraine, to oversee the field leveling operation. The engineer was a very pleasant, young man, who was obviously a specialist in his field. We met often and he showed us how the field would be once the grading work was accomplished. As grading began, they left several earth pillars to show where the original ground level had been. It was surprising how deep some of the earth cuts had to be once the field was complete; the engineer remained on the job because there was always something more to do.

Sometime during WWII, when ČOS was inoperative and I was again in Prague, I met Br. Očenášek in Reiser Park. He was now an old, white-haired and alarmed gentleman. He told me he had just learned that the engineer-surveyor he had hired and kept employed for such a long period of time was now fighting for Hitler against the Russians. Apparently, he was a volunteer in a Ukrainian Army unit, dressed in the Nazi uniform and

fighting against his former country. Br. Očenášek was very grief-stricken about the situation because the young man was now an ally of Hitler. We had many Ukrainians who, after the Russian Revolution, had deserted their homeland and settled in our country. Our government helped them settle here to ease their return to a normal life. Many years later, after I was already in the US, I mentioned this event to a Sokol brother, who also knew the engineer. He told me that he had met the young man in his office in Kyiv, where on his wall was displayed a map which showed a proposed Ukrainian Republic, which reached westward almost to Košice, in Eastern Slovakia.

I also talked to Dr. Aust, who wrote a book titled "Troops of General Vlasov in Bohemia" about the engineer. He told me, "Well, of course, the dwellers east of Košice are already all Ukrainians" and further, he showed me how all the political affairs are intertwined.

## **THE 1926 VIII SLET**

The VIII Slet in 1926 carried all the signs of work by free Sokols in a free land. It was the first Slet performed at Strahov Stadium under the leadership of Jindra Vaníček, Director of Men, and Milada Malá, Director of Women.

**EDITORIAL COMMENT.** The huge Strahov Stadium was the largest in the world with a field as large as nine football fields and the stadium could accommodate 250,000 spectators. The growth of Sokol membership, with the establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918, was such that Letna Stadium was not adequate for the 1926 Slet.

The original plans for Strahov Stadium were almost completed by the Slet building committee. There were already new plans to construct a second smaller stadium named Masaryk, with another military training field and even a military gym floor. For the Slet instructors, there existed modern living quarters reserved during the Slet periods, and available kitchens and recreation areas, so we would not have to leave the area.

The movement of the Slet to the Strahov stadium brought with it a feeling of permanency that was the basis for broad physical and technical development. The impression that this training area would be used for years to come gave us the courage for a bigger and more daring investment. There were much larger spaces provided for dressing rooms and for assembly of large groups. The new communication system, which substituted megaphones instead of the formerly used trumpets to

assist instructors in assembling the participants, was an improvement almost beyond imagination.

The VIII Slet lasted from June 21 to July 6, 1926. The activities had opened the preceding winter when the winter Slet games were held in Jilemnice, a town in a mountainous region about 65 miles north of Prague. In previous years, such as the first Slet, the small boys from Prague's Schools performed and at the second Slet, the juniors from Prague middle schools participated. In the 1926 Slet, junior boys and girls participated in a separate Slet one week before the main Slet for Czechoslovak and South Slavic Sokols. In the Junior Slet, there were 13,000 junior Boys and 14,000 junior Girls.

Based on our experiences during the 1920 VII Slet, we were better prepared in both organization and allocation of responsibilities for the 1926 VIII Slet. We did a better job in allocating dressing rooms and control of participants, but there were still some big problems. I had the responsibility for arranging all women's activities, not only during the Slet period, but also for all pre-Slet functions. For me and my commission, it required long hours administering to the needs of the participants, securing all important locations, marking field positions, assembly areas and marching routes. We had to know how many entrants there were, where they would be located on the field, where they would enter, and how they would leave. The technical work on the field was controlled by paid attendants under the guidance of the Director of Men, Václav Vorel.

One incident occurred just before the entrance of participants from the Prague's schools, while the sisters in charge of staking out of the field were taking a break. I noticed two Girl Scouts on the field with a brush and a bucket doing something. I went to them and asked what they were doing. They said they were painting the marks with green paint. When I asked who told them to do this, they said the sister leader. I asked, "Which marks are you painting?", and they said, "All of them." Obviously, the girls had misunderstood their orders. My heart stopped for a moment. I confiscated the bucket and ran to the nearest telephone to call for assistance in repairing the damage. Fortunately, the damage was not too extensive, and we were able to repair it in time.

A far worse situation occurred on the day the junior Girls were to participate. I received a call from the Sokol Secretary at 5 a.m., which awoke me from a deep sleep.

He told me to wake the instructors and go to the field, which was under water. It had rained all night and in the center of the field there was now a large puddle covering at least a quarter of the field. Unfortunately, the puddle was in an area where we had as many markers as poppy seeds. In the exact center of the field was a central marker. From that guide, the columns flowed to their specific locations. Now, everything was covered by a thin coating of brown mud, and we could not see any of the lines of markers. I was lucky because I had the plan for the markers in my head and I knew the exact distance in steps between each marker. After studying the situation, I calculated where the center marker should be and plunged my arm down to my elbow in the water and located the center marker. From that point, I was able to reset the center section for the junior Girls' entrance and I depended upon the leaders of the other sections to handle the remaining requirement. I was not sure that everything would turn out well and the rehearsal time was very close. I still had some flags in my arm, so with them I ran to the instructor's bridge to control the right entrance for junior Girls. On the steps to the bridge, I met Jan Masaryk (the president's son), beautifully dressed in a white suit, who did not miss a single performance, even a rehearsal. He wanted to experience the joy of every moment and in his enthusiasm, hugged me and pressed his white suit against the wet flags. When later, after all the tension ceased and I had a chance to look at my blouse I discovered it was multi-colored instead of the original white. I could then imagine how the minister must have looked when he entered the governmental box after meeting me.

The flood was not our worst experience. That honor occurred on the day the small boys and girls were to perform. The boys were already on the field performing, when I went to see if the girls were in formation and ready to enter the field. Everything looked good and the girls were ready to go. The main entrance to the field contained three gates, which were located directly below the celebrity area. The center gate was called the "gate of experts" and was used by the participants to enter the field. The two side gates were used when the groups departed the arena. When the boys were finished, the excited audience burst into stormy applause, and the satisfied boys responded by swinging their caps. They retained their ranks until they reached the exit gates and

then, with the tension gone, they exuded boundless joy from a job well done, and galloped toward their dressing rooms. However, they ran into the girl's formation and did not pause or detour around them. The girls jumped aside and because there was no way to avoid the following formations of boys, the total girl's formation was soon in shambles. I telephoned the instructor's bridge to ask for more time by admitting a small group of guests. In the end, they had to admit two groups before we were able to realign the girls into their proper formation.

The flood and the disruption of the girls' formations are side issues which the public never sees. They only see a solitary figure standing on the instructor's bridge waving some flags. They don't know the hard work and long hours of effort and the high state of tension that affects all the helpers. To put on a Slet of this type, thousands of individuals are needed. These include the instructors, the field markers, the kitchen personnel, the administrators, ushers, ticket takers, and many others. The helpers are the people who are never recognized by the public or press, but without them, it would be impossible to conduct such an undertaking.

On one of the Slet days I met the Masaryk family right after their arrival from the presidential home in Laný, but without the president. Alice, his wife, told me that when they departed, they left a sad president who reproached them because he was not going. He asked them, "are you leaving me at home?" This situation upset me, as I could not understand how a president, and such as Tomáš G. Masaryk, could be treated in such a manner. I immediately protested and proposed that we telephone Laný and invite him to attend. I was quickly informed that the president is not a free man, but that he is a political person with whom visits must be negotiated as with a pawn or other piece on a chessboard. The president's presence at the Slet was a political decision based on an equal distribution to all political parties at all gymnastic activities. Because Sokol is a national organization, it cannot show bias to any religious group or political party or to any one individual. After such an explanation, I reluctantly accepted the decision.

The 1926 VIII Slet coincided with the 510th anniversary of the death of Hus, the religious reformer.

Because the 500th anniversary in 1915 could not be celebrated due to a ban by the Austrian Government we were required to limit our celebration to a quiet flower

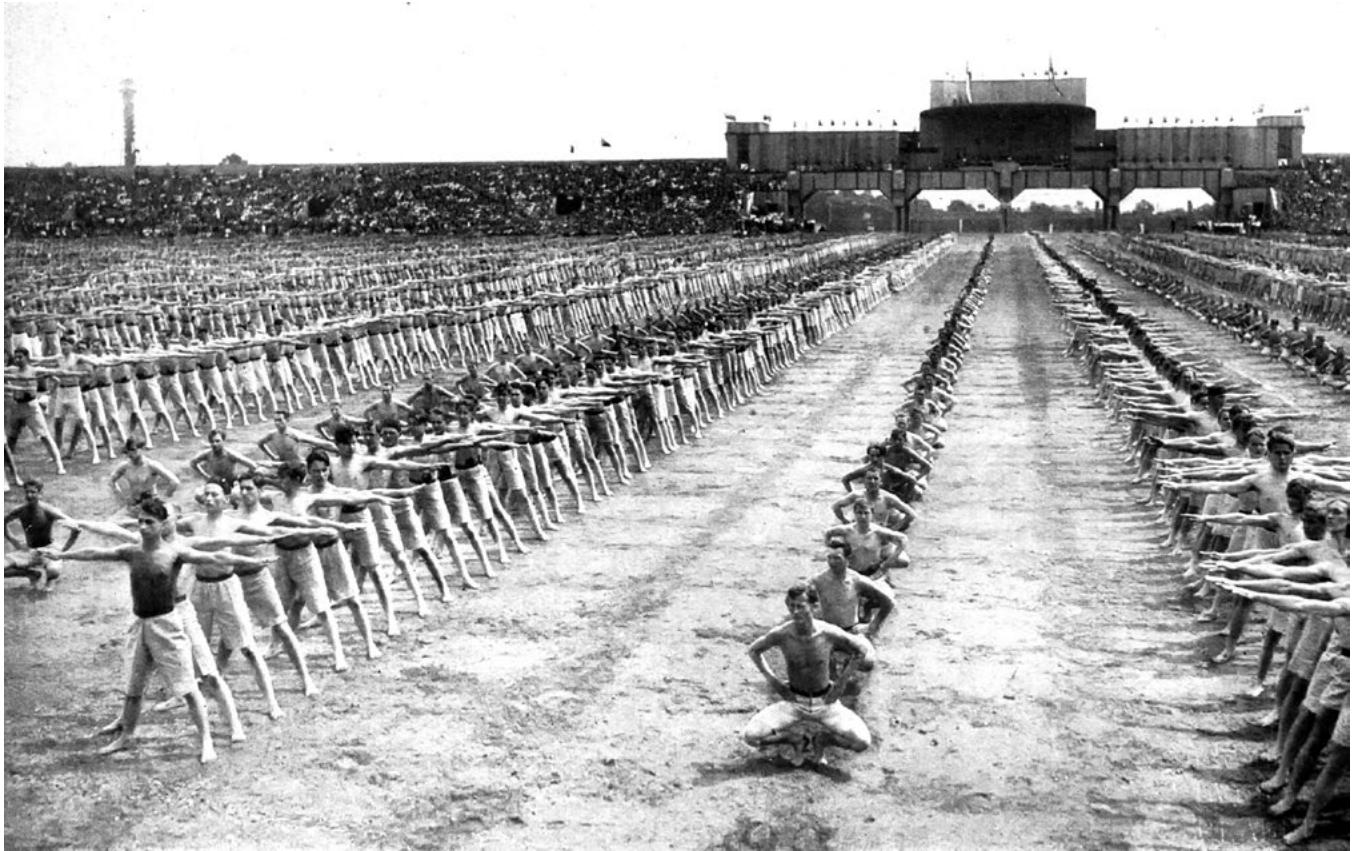
demonstration, thus the ČOS board decided to honor Hus 10 years later at the Slet.

The Slet procession on the 6th of July was performed in memory of Jan Hus. It ended in Oldtown Square, where Sokol President Joseph Steiner festively presented the Sokols to President Masaryk in memory of Jan Hus, the great national hero. He declared that we would always honor the memory of Jan Hus and hold him before us as our idol against all enemies. Participants in this Slet came from all elements of the union of Slavic Sokols, except for the Polish contingent. They had prepared approximately 1,000 men to participate in the calisthenics drill, but because of pressure brought by the church, which objected to the Hus memorial celebration, they were forced to withdraw. Overall, the Slet was a huge success with 30,000 men and 25,000 women participating. The Slet closed with a scene titled "Where is my Home?"

The day before the junior Girls were to perform their number, it rained constantly with no relief in sight. This was also the first time the instructors were lodged in rooms at the site, which facilitated the coordination of Slet activities. Because the weather was so bad and nothing could be done on the field, most of the instructors went to Tyrš House where I met Br. Karel Heller, who was first deputy director of ČOS and editor of the Sokol Gazette. He invited me into his office for a chat, and it soon became obvious he wanted to talk about our contingency plans for the junior girls. He asked me what we were going to do if the weather did not change. Then he asked how we would handle the situation if the weather changed at the last minute. In the discussion, he made me aware that as with all large enterprises, we must have plans to deal with all possibilities and be prepared to implement them at the proper time. Our predecessors had cautioned us that we must be prepared to handle any emergency no matter how unpleasant it was.

On the day prior to the Slet procession, President Masaryk welcomed representatives of all Sokol districts to the Castle where they exchanged salutations and presents.

On 14 August 1925, the Federation of Slavic Sokols was established in Warsaw. Adam Zamoyski, the president of the Polish Sokols, presided over the meeting, which included the elected representatives of ČOS, the Federation of South Slavic Sokols, the Federation of Polish Sokols and the Federation of Russian Sokol units located overseas.



Junior boys performing calisthenic drill in the 1926 VIII Slet, the first in the new Strahov Stadium.



## FROM THE VIII TO THE IX SLET, 1926–1932

### SYLLABUS AND APTITUDE TEST

The acceptance of women into Sokol as full members with their own leadership in all physical activities enabled them to put into practice their organizational and teaching abilities. They were able to put their own ideas into their body movements that they introduced into women's drills. These innovations were encouraged by Tyrš and he, in turn, reinforced these efforts by creating the *Gymnastic Society of Ladies and Girls in Prague*, and sponsoring the personal education of its training staff. Sister Kleména Hanušová proved herself as its most successful scholar with her pioneer publications in the field of women's and children's gymnastics.

In the Nineteenth century, women had already made great strides in seeking admission to what was then an all-male Sokol. They constantly tried to introduce levels of difficulty in gymnastics adapted to the differences of age and sex. Markéta Vachtlová, in the manuscript for her book entitled, *From the Beginnings of Women's Physical Training in Sokol*, writes that by 1902, the women's commission was resolved to work out designs for women's and children's gymnastics.

The necessity for designing programs that are suitable for individual levels of skill, sex and age groups became of prime importance when women's competition became commonplace throughout the Czechoslovak Republic. Sokol at that time divided men's competition into three levels, low, medium and high. But there was not uniform measurement of accomplishment or a standard method of classifying female competitors into individual competing grades. The same three divisions of skill levels for women were demanded by the districts; but while the men knew how to divide the levels of difficulty for men, no one knew how to separate the levels for women.

It was very clear to the men which skill belonged to which grade, but for women, we could not find the correct degree as to how to rank the difficulties of the levels of efficiency. Tyrš himself proposed the idea of difficulty levels for gymnastic routines by establishing the three levels, or grades, for competition. From him the graduates of instructor schools learned how to classify the various exercises. After their four-to-six-week instructor staff schools, the graduates were very capable of handling large groups of gymnasts and contributing to the development of new methods and standards for all participants. After Tyrš' death, most knowledge was passed on to the next generation orally.

Once the draft plan for ranking levels of proficiency was approved, it gave rise to what we called competitions of efficiency. These competitions were programmed for all age levels for all women beginning with the start of the school year and continuing throughout the entire year. All gymnasts were required to participate in these competitions. The results were announced in terms of points awarded so that the gymnasts could be divided within levels into teams. Tyrš published an article dealing with the distribution of skill levels in an article entitled "About Sokol Training System."

The instructors of women not only understood the reasoning behind the division of skill levels, but they also extended it to apply to all age groups and developed the means to apply it to all training sessions. The first time a gymnastic competition based on the division of skills concept was used occurred in 1931. But this was not enough for me. In all Sokol competitions thereafter, we insisted that as a part of the compulsory routine requirements, the divisions by skill levels would be made public at least six months prior to competition.

This allowed competitors to practice both their compulsory and optional exercises for six months prior to being judged on them. I searched for Tyrš' concept for a versatile development of a harmonious personality. I continued to long for competitions that would determine the all-around symmetrical development of all basic physical abilities, strengths, skills and speed.

We had been successful in developing some basic forms of apparatus movements which we could classify into five grades of efficiency. Why couldn't we use this same distribution in competitions by demanding that the competitors be required to perform these exercises on demand without notifying them ahead of time? We could announce the compulsory arrangements on the field at the time of competitions and allow time for the competitors to rehearse the movements once or twice before they were judged on the combinations. Of course, this mandated a need to keep the combination of movements short or even to develop two short combinations for judging. Naturally, this concept ran into a lot of resistance, but all had to acknowledge that while such competitions were more indicative of an individual's abilities, it did create an added burden on the staff. Now a new problem reared its head. Was there enough standardization among the instructors to make such a concept work? The tension over the concept continued to rise as the final meeting of district instructors before the Slet in 1932 neared, when a final decision would be made.

At that time, Br. Havel, an old friend of women instructors, approached me. In the struggle to have women accepted into Sokol, he had originally stood against their entry because he had wanted to preserve the Sokol aim of a national army. After the decision to admit women was made, he tried to educate us in the Tyrš spirit. With a smile on his face he said, "You know I have never interjected myself into your matters, but this time I must have my say if we are to have a successful Slet based on the Tyrš memory. If you insist on implementing your proposal on the new arrangement for women's competitions, you will have no competition. We have already had some experience along these same lines, and I might point out it was a bitter experience. The same idea as you have proposed was tried by Br. Jindra Vaníček before the IV Slet." His proposal had been accepted but in the spring meeting before the Slet, the district instructors unanimously announced they had no competitors.

The men and boys did not know what pieces they should practice when preparing for the meet, and because they did not want to risk failure or embarrassment, they did not register for the competition. To save the competitions, we quickly developed some compulsory skills. Havel added that we would run into the same situation because women would react exactly as the men did and no one would compete.

This information was very unexpected and upsetting, but I was still not willing to accept surrender. The prior experience had occurred over twenty-five years ago and there were very few men and certainly no women who would still remember the situation. It illustrated that my idea was not entirely unwise as Jindra Vaníček had tried the same concept and that thought reinforced my resolution to proceed with the new concept. The Havel discussions showed me a way to solve the problem by giving the competitors a guide on how to prepare themselves for the meet. I went to the usual advisor of those who were having difficulty, Br. Pelikán. As usual he went directly to the heart of the problem. "Can you write such a guide in one week?" I responded that if I worked day and night, I could if he left it to me. The decisive meeting of district instructors would be in fourteen days, so everything had to be complete, including printing, by that time.

On the second day following this discussion, Br. Pelikán called my secretary and told her that I would not be available to anyone for the next week and if there was any action necessary, it would be handled by the Assistant Director of Women or by Br. Pelikán himself. Then he took me to a small room prepared with a typewriter and paper and locked me in the room for my seclusion and safety. At noon and then once again at 6 p.m. for dinner, he came for me, and after we ate, we returned and worked until 11 p.m. We went through this same routine each day until Saturday evening when I took the almost completed manuscript home to finish the work. On Monday morning at 6:30 a.m. I contacted an apprentice from the Gregr printing house who came for the manuscript and the start of the printing process. Two hours later, I went to the printing house where they had a series of gallies ready for my first proof reading. As I corrected them, they were taken to a second editorial assistant for corrections. It was then returned to me for a second proof reading. On Saturday I found a small booklet entitled *Preparations for Junior Girls and Women Competitors* on

my desk. This booklet was issued to each district instructor who, after examining it, agreed to proceed with the competitions using the new concept.

As I remember the situation, there were no discussions at the meeting. The ten thousand booklets were quickly sold out and within a month, a second printing of the booklet was authorized. Following this, the booklet was translated into the languages of those nations who would be competing in the Slet. The Golden Gregr Printing House had a long-time connection with Sokol. Its original proprietor, Dr. Julius Gregr, was an 1862 member of the first Board of Prague Sokol and I believe that all the current employees of the Plant were Sokols. The booklet project had been successfully completed because of the dedicated support of all concerned. From the Secretary of ČOS to the printing house apprentice, all had contributed their time and skill to the project, and I cannot forget for a moment the personal support and sincere criticism of my dear Sokol friend, Br. Havel.

The new method of competition was soon accepted and favored for its diversity and versatility of preparation. The five categories of competitions (three for women and two for Junior girls), included basic elements on all the main apparatuses with variations and modifications regarding grips and approaches. Out of these examples were chosen the compulsory arrangements for the competitions so those who trained on all examples within their category were certain to be well prepared.

At the same time, some needed changes were made to the rules governing competition. The most important change limited gymnasts to compete only in the category in which they had been classified through earlier examinations or competitions. Thus, this rule prevented some competitors from stepping down to a lower category of skill and eliminating the disgust by beginners when more prominent athletes competed in categories below their level of skills.

The new method of competitions received support when we began our preparations for the Olympic Games. After the second world war and, of course, after the interruption of ČOS activities in 1941 and following the restoration of activities in 1945, our goal was to prepare our gymnasts for the 1948 Olympic Games in London.

In December 1945, it was decided that Sokol would participate in the 1948 Olympics to be held in London even though ČOS had not been fully restored. There was

still no follow-up on district appointments and the old registration of competitors was no longer valid. It was enough that we undertook the task of writing the efficiency examinations. Within a few weeks, we sent examinations for fourth and fifth level gymnasts to the district training centers. Within two years, the centers, despite incredibly difficult circumstances, produced a team of women gymnasts which won the gold medal in London.

In America, the Sokol community had not introduced this progressive method of competition because the training of women was entirely in the hands of the men. The American concept was that women's competitive methods had to agree with the same method used with the men. When the Czech Sokols in Exile were organized, they were scattered into small groups throughout the world and their development to a large degree depended on cooperation of their American counterparts. At that time, this support mainly was limited to mutual participation in Slets and exhibitions. Therefore, even the competition rules for the Sokols in exile had to be adjusted to agree with the rules of the American communities. It, therefore, remains that advances in Sokol methods and ideals must not be forgotten. While the Tyrš ideal for an all-around Sokol is not Utopia, it is a goal which is reachable and must be pursued if we are to fulfill Tyrš' dream. We hope that the free future of Sokol in a free country will incorporate all that is valuable into the Tyrš system.

## IX SLET AND TYRŠ CELEBRATIONS

The biggest task of the ČOS board that was selected in 1931 was the important task of celebrating the 100th anniversary of the birth of Sokol's founder, Miroslav Tyrš, born on September 15, 1832, in conjunction with the 1932 Slet. This celebration was not limited to only a recall or memory of his birth. It was to be an appropriate explanation to all Sokol descendants of the greatness and depth of his legacy and the direction in which his work had progressed. Early preparations for the celebration started three and one-half years earlier, when a three-member commission was elected. Its members were: Jandásek, Pechlát and Zeman, all Tyrš pupils. They were commissioned to review all Tyrš' written works. President Tomáš G. Masaryk also contributed to the preparations for the event by naming the 28th Army Regiment as the Prague regimen of Tyrš and Fügner.

ČOS donated a ribbon to the regimental flag inscribed with the Tyrš motto: "To succeed or to fall."

The Tyrš memorial in 1930 imposed a task on all districts to elect sub-committees to coordinate local Tyrš celebrations by local units and to elect reporters to submit articles to local newspapers. Through this action all Sokols were included in the celebrations which were to be both formal displays and events of lasting value to continue the Tyrš legacy.

Thus, for three and one-half years, all efforts were made to acquaint the entire nation, and friendly foreign nations, with Tyrš' legacy. A committee worked on the compilation and publication of all Tyrš' writings. This momentous task was completed on time for the 100th anniversary. Especially meaningful articles were translated into eight languages and published throughout our friendly nations. The individual units were charged with the task of assembling the works by Tyrš and through a system of seminars and meetings to acquaint their membership with the Tyrš legacy. It was an endeavor of love for great man which was culminated by the unveiling of statues of memorial plaques and the naming of streets after the founder of Sokol. ČOS initiated prizes to award authors of especially outstanding articles concerning the anniversary. Of special interest regarding the Tyrš articles was the emphasis on the educational aspects of the Sokol mission with its thrust directed toward the Sokol youth.

The culmination of the celebration was the IX Slet. In its final scene, the audience was introduced to ancient Greece with its regard for gymnastics and the direct relationship to the modern Sokol ideals which are based on Grecian concepts.

The 1932 IX Slet, which should have been a joyous occasion, did not have an auspicious preparation period. All Europe was passing through an economic crisis which started in America and spread worldwide. The aftereffects of large-scale unemployment had a serious impact on national life and generated many fears for the Slet's success. Many individuals varied in their fears and warnings concerning the possible economic disaster we would face if we proceeded with the Slet preparations. Of course, there were many anxieties concerning the consequences on Sokol if we had a Slet failure.

The ČOS board had to devote a lot of their efforts toward the unemployment problem which was affecting many of our members. Many programs were initiated

with the main objective of earning money which could be distributed to the needy. Contributors to fund drives were given glass heart-shaped pendants which were proudly worn around the neck on a chain or attached to a bracelet. The development and production of the pendants provided meaningful employment for many of the unemployed. The unemployment situation left many members without an adequate income to obtain even the very least essentials for a bare existence. ČOS, in a move to provide more employment, ordered large quantities of glass items, such as glass night lights and even wooden boxes for use as home banks. All the proceeds were then directed to benefit programs for the unemployed.

The Sokol units throughout the country took up the challenge and under the direction of their educators developed ways to make money. In one Slovak unit, women developed an embroidery business when all other sources of income were eliminated. This business nourished an entire village until the worst of the crisis had passed.

Once again, the Sokol courage and sincerity had won. The Slet did not suffer from the unemployment problem. On the contrary, it considerably contributed to resolving the problem by providing work for many thousands of people at a time when it was most needed. But new fears reared their heads when it was learned that starting in 1929 the units began reporting a decrease in the numbers of junior boys attending classes. From the very beginning, Sokol did not strive to increase its membership by attracting mature individuals to join its ranks. Rather, membership drives were always directed toward attracting the youth of the nation. This was why it became so disconcerting when news of the decreases became known and why immediate action was taken to learn the cause.

There were some individuals who supported the theory that Sokol had outlived its usefulness and that juniors did not like apparatus work, physical training or excessive discipline. The ČOS board of instructors took into consideration all these viewpoints and decided to go directly to the juniors to find answers to the problem. A survey form was developed which contained questions dealing with youth's likes and dislikes regarding Sokol, and what they would like to see changed. The answers were surprising. There were no objections to the apparatus work, the physical training or even the discipline.

In fact, the youth wanted more apparatus and more discipline. Because some people in the Sokol hierarchy believed that some of the decrease in the junior ranks was because of the influence of companion programs such as scouting and sports, an examination was made of these activities. It was discovered that these programs were experiencing the same decrease in their Sokol attendance, a decline that was the consequence of a lower birth rate during the war years from 1915 to 1918.

**EDITORIAL COMMENT.** It needs to be recalled that a major impetus for the Sokol movement was the need of a Czech nation. But by the early 1930s Czechoslovakia was already in its second decade of nationhood. This fact underscores that a major purpose of the Sokol movement had been achieved. Therefore, the success of the movement was now dependent upon the goals of brotherhood, physical fitness and national unity. That Sokol not only survived, but thrived, is a testimony to the Sokol movement's many values that the brothers and sisters continued to appreciate.

After these bigger fears were put to rest, the instructors turned their attention to Slet preparation whose goal was to prove the success of Sokol ideals even after 70 years since their founding. We tried to develop a Slet which revealed Sokol's deep meaning, its development and its sphere of influence on all components of the nation. We initiated a study of physical education in general, and education of youth to develop procedures which would reflect any required advances in the art. We tried to incorporate into Sokol activities all age groups, types of employment and lifestyles. To me personally, it was regretful that we were not allowed to include in our Slets any children younger than nine years of age. I sincerely felt that public displays of children under nine would bring to Sokol a life-long dedication and commitment otherwise unobtainable.

Because I wanted to include these younger children in the Slet, I took my problem to the ČOS secretary, Br. Pelikán, who was known for his support for all new ideas and concepts. Together we travelled to the Prague Sokol to observe the small girls at their training session. The objective of the training of young girls is to make the most of unusual approaches to exercising. Such approaches were intended to maintain the children's interest and provide an outlet for their imaginations. We did not believe in having them memorize instructive

motions but rather we wanted them to express themselves through dramatic expression and imitation.

Out of this approach originated a gymnastic composition entitled "A Fairy Tale of Tyrš." The composition focused on a young Tyrš and told how he lived through his childhood in his village; how he mingled with the village youth; how he got to know nature; how the village youth amused themselves, and what they observed. Soon we dropped all prescribed motions and gave the children complete freedom to express themselves as the story unfolded. The musical composer, Jaroslav Křička, wrote the musical score which was based on our national songs. For the children it was easy for them to remember, and it allowed each of them to make their own statement. This composition and instructional approach completely changed our method of teaching young girls and was only the first of many similar compositions where imitating rather than memorizing was used as the instructional technique.

The separation of motion compositions by age and sex groups proved to be successful in the instruction of adolescents. In a composition created by Hana Burgerová, the junior girls used tender smooth movements using small wreaths, whereas the junior boys had in the Očenášek composition militant, struggling movements using iron poles. Očenášek, who devoted himself to the development of drills for junior Boys, proposed they be clothed in a one-piece training sack which was an excellent contrast to their beautiful sun-tanned bodies. When we looked at them from the commanding bridge, I realized that this was the same group that had given us so many fears. These were the children who had been born in the war years and who at a tender age had been exposed to undernourishment and other deprivations and yet, despite that, the Sokol physical training had formed them into such beautiful youths.

The junior girls performed compositions on the high beam and the women performed a drill with Indian clubs. In the overall Slet program, all levels of age were represented, as well as a wealth and a variety of activities included in the Tyrš system. In all, there were over fifty various levels of competitions, some common types and some very special in which 800 junior girls and more than 1,500 women competed. I don't remember the number of men who competed, but I do know it was much higher than the number of women.

The 1932 Slet included the already standardized skill levels of competitions as well as a firm delineation in efficiency levels for the women and junior girls. Along with this standardization, there was a delineated a logical way gymnasts could advance to higher skill levels as their abilities increased. The divisions by skill and efficiency levels met with wholehearted approval by all competitors and by all units represented.

This Slet was the first one that I directed. In the previous two Slets, I oversaw entrances by all Sokol components, which was not only hard work and completely exhausting, but I was out of the audience's sight. Any difficulty we had then needed to be corrected before the groups came into the sight of the audience. When something had to be corrected, I had only to look at the command bridge and one look from them was of more impact than if the leader was present on the ground before me.

At this Slet, the entrances of the small and junior boys went smoothly as did those performed by the women. But when the mainstream of women passed under the command bridge and began to divide into separate streams for movement toward their markers, I could see from that the stream had divided incorrectly as there were more files in one stream than in the other. The leaders on the ground did not have the advantage of my view, so they didn't know what was happening. If I allowed the streams to continue when the time came to separate streams to their markers, the results would have been a disaster. I immediately stopped the music and gave instructions to the leaders on the ground by telephone as to how they could correct the mistake. The correction occurred smoothly and quickly and once again the music began. Although the mistake had been corrected, there remained tension in the leaders for never had such a mistake happened in a Slet. After the drill was finished and I was returning to the command bridge, I had to pass by the Presidential Box. President Masaryk called me to him and asked what had happened and how could such a thing happen. I did not know myself. The president hastily complimented me because I was able to quickly correct the mistake.

After the women's exercises were finished, my duties on the bridge ended so I walked down to the box reserved for the ČOS board to watch the demonstration by the Sokol cavalry. There I met with the ministerial chairman, Švehla, and till the end of the program, I con-

versed with him. When President Masaryk stood up in the next box to depart, the members of the board moved to the rail to say our farewells. He noticed us and came to the rail. There he shook hands with Švehla and stroked my face. He said to Švehla, "I like her; she is good." On the following day the president hosted a special reception in the Kings Garden where he received all members of the board. After all introductions had been made, T.G. Masaryk expressed the wish that I should sit next to him. To the board he then said, "I like her; she is good." This, of course, was the same as he said on the previous day. I knew that if Masaryk said something, it had its purpose, and he had a good reason for his statement. I did not allow this special recognition to go to my head because I knew I was at the beginning of my new Sokol leadership and because of his kind heart and understanding of people, he didn't want any adverse criticism directed at me. I can think of no other reason for his special attention, except he did not want the mistake in the Slet to break me or ruin my self-confidence. Such was Masaryk.

For a long time, I tried to figure out how such a mistake in the Slet entrance could have occurred. I was sure the error occurred at the very beginning of the stream entry. The technique that is used to make a turn with a wide stream of marchers is to have the innermost gymnast pivot in place and the outermost personnel increase their step in order to swing the stream in an orderly fashion. What apparently had happened is that the lines had shifted over two columns so that when the time came to divide from 16 instead of two streams of eight abreast. Experience teaches us that some good emerges from every mistake. Until this Slet, the method of controlling entrances for calisthenics had been the same, but now, as the numbers of gymnasts increased, it became apparent we had to simplify the entrances because the lines had become too lengthy and complex.

## CHANGING OF THE GUARD

The death of Karel Vaníček, on June 24th, was on the eve of the 1926 Slet. He is remembered as one of the early students of Tyrš, who served as Sokol's publicist and founder of the Sokol Museum. Little did the founder realize that the work of his followers, like Karel Vaníček, would bring such glorious results as liberation from Austrian bondage and creation of our independent Czechoslovakia. In the autumn meeting of the

ČOS board in 1930, two leaders of Sokol, President Josef Scheiner and Director of Men, Jindra Vaníček resigned because of poor health. Both, however, agreed to continue in their jobs, at the urgent request of the board, until the completion of their term and after regular elections were held in the spring of 1931.

By the time the spring elections arrived, a third of the board had to be replaced because of health problems. In addition to Vaníček and Scheiner, replacements for Director of Women, Milada Malá, and Vice President Karel Heller, who was also the editor of the Sokol Věsník (Gazette), were needed. Sister Malá, who grew up with Sokol, had been sick for some time. She told me on two previous occasions that she was going to resign and would recommend that I be elected in her place. When I told her I would refuse to be a candidate for the office, she changed her mind twice and continued in the position. But, now with her health rapidly deteriorating and with my years of experience, I no longer felt there was any reason for me to refuse the position. At the spring meeting, the following individuals were elected: President, Dr. Stanislav Bekovský; Men's Director, Agathon Heller; and Women's Director, Marie Provazníková.

Milada Malá had contributed 21 years of senior leadership to the Sokol program. In the IV Slet she participated as a small girl and in the V Slet in 1907, she was in the small group of women that were in leadership roles. During the last 11 years of her service, she was the Director of Women, in a role at a time which was not clearly defined; thus, each new problem became a learning experience. Among her assistant instructors, there were very few individuals who had my experience handling large groups of gymnasts. Most assistants had received their experience at the unit level or at best at the district level. To further complicate her period of service, the Moravian district instructors only reluctantly accepted her leadership and were inclined to conduct their own district meetings and consider themselves as a separate entity. The Moravian sisters had refused to acknowledge their own district instructor Sister Šourková's merit or honor her to receive a medal for her efforts, which were considerable.

In 1932 the ČOS board of instructors resolved that I should represent them at a meeting of the Moravian district women instructors. I asked for guidance and instruction regarding what I should support as ČOS

views and what would be my own views. Because there were some stories that the Moravian district instructor, Sister Táborská, was going to oppose Sister Malá as a candidate for the senior women's director position, I asked her directly if the stories were true. She denied the story because she had heard that I was a candidate for the position. I said to her that if that was the truth, then I would accept the candidacy opposing Milada Malá. In the end, I travelled to Moravia and was able to resolve all outstanding problems and soothe feelings so that future dealings were fully cooperative and pleasant.

The men's board of instructors experienced very complicated situations. Jindra Vaníček did not want to continue as the Director of Men and told all members of the board as early as the 1920 Slet that he wanted to retire. The board had convinced him that it was too early to retire and besides, there was no one adequately trained to replace him. Vaníček disagreed with that conclusion and suggested that possibly Miroslav Klinger would be a suitable replacement. After being convinced that Sokol needed him, Jindra remained until after the VII Sokol Slet when he suffered a stroke, which seriously affected his mental and physical abilities. Thereafter, he was confined to a wheelchair and the board depended on the first vice-instructor to carry the full burden of the load. When in 1931 the district instructors felt a strong obligation toward the Assistant Director of Men, Agathon Heller, they voted him into office as Director of Men.

When the time came to vote, brother Klinger had to leave because he was one of the candidates. I met him in the hall where he was pacing like a lion in a cage and smoking one cigarette after another. When he saw me, he exploded with excitement and said if he had joined DTJ (a working man's club) he could have been their president. In this moment he himself revealed his true nature.

The election of Agathon Heller brought with it full cooperation from the instructor's board and a cheerful response to his guidance. His reign was very successful, as he had from the beginning been a sincere and unselfish advisor to the first women's board of instructors, elected after WWI. He continued in this Vyšehrad Sokol tradition, initiated in the late 19th century by Barbara Sourek, brothers, Rudolf Bilek and Heller. The next most faithful and reliable friend of women instructors was Augustin Očenášek who, with brother Karel Pospisil and Hana Ďoubová introduced new gymnastic concepts.

The new concepts had been witnessed by Br. Očenášek at the International Congress of Physical Education in 1913, in Paris. None of the new concepts were accepted at face value, but rather were modified to harmonize with the Tyrš program.

The election of Jindra Vaníček brought with it various stories about his having only a few close friends, and even with these individuals he seldom communicated. One anecdote making the rounds concerned how he lived next door to Franc Beranek the president of Sokol in Smíchov. It was rumored that they would leave their dwellings and walk to a wine cellar, located in Malá Strana (Lesser Town). After sitting down without any discussion, Franc would ask: "Are we having Ludmila?" Jindra would respond, "We will have Ludmila. Mister headwaiter, two Ludmilas." They sat and drank and looked over the environment. When they had finished their drinks, Franc asked: "Are we having one more Ludmila?" Jindra responded, "We will have one more! Mr. Headwaiter, we will have two more Ludmilas." When their glasses were empty, the conversation continued. Jindra: "Shall we pay?" Franc: "Mr. Headwaiter, we will pay." They paid their bill, put on their coats and walked back to their apartments. When they were about to part, Jindra turned to Franc and said, "We had a good chat!" This anecdote was typical. About gymnastics, he was very well-versed, but about people, he knew very little.

Apparently, Klinger was convinced that if Agathon Heller was too successful with the new project as indications were now implying, the instructor staff would elect him to the Klinger position at the next election. Even though the brothers assured Klinger that he would be re-elected, their protestations were in vain. I could not understand at the time how individuals, such as Očenášek, Havel and others, could so subordinate their views to the will of Klinger. Today, and based on my many years of experience, I suppose they voted for the lesser evil to prevent a big split in the board of instructors. This experience was the first manifestation of Klinger's impious conduct.

During the long period of Jindra Vaníček's sickness, the men's board of instructors may have reached the age when they became too stagnated in their outlook, while the younger and more aggressive women instructors eagerly devoted themselves to their work. Additionally, women had for some time been opposed to his view-

points. Klinger now enjoyed a preponderance of men on the instructor staff who, while they were very experienced, still were prone to support any action that would subordinate the women's role and cause the women to "toe the line." Klinger's second weapon that he used against the women was his total control over the candidate selection process for board membership. This estrangement and mistrust between both boards lasted for a long period. While individuals, groups and some commissions continued to cooperate and function correctly, the relationship was not as joyful as it could have been.

Death of some old-time board members now reared its ugly head. On Jan. 11, 1932, long-time Sokol President Scheiner died and in August of the same year, perhaps, the best of Tyrš' pupils, Br. Josef Klenke died. Scheiner's death had a large impact on the entire nation, and particularly on the Sokol movement. The press, both friendly and unfriendly, marked his death with many expressions of admiration and honor. Even the highly regarded German journal *Die Leibeshebungen* published a flattering article admiring Scheiner's leadership qualities even though he never concealed his hostility toward his enemies, the Germans, and put into practice his ideals on an "international front." The article ended with the words: "before this dead enemy we have our weapons in desire so that the personality of this fearless hero, who was such an asset to his nation should become a role model in either war or peace, even to leaders of our own German Turners most shoud; but add (German gymnastics society)."

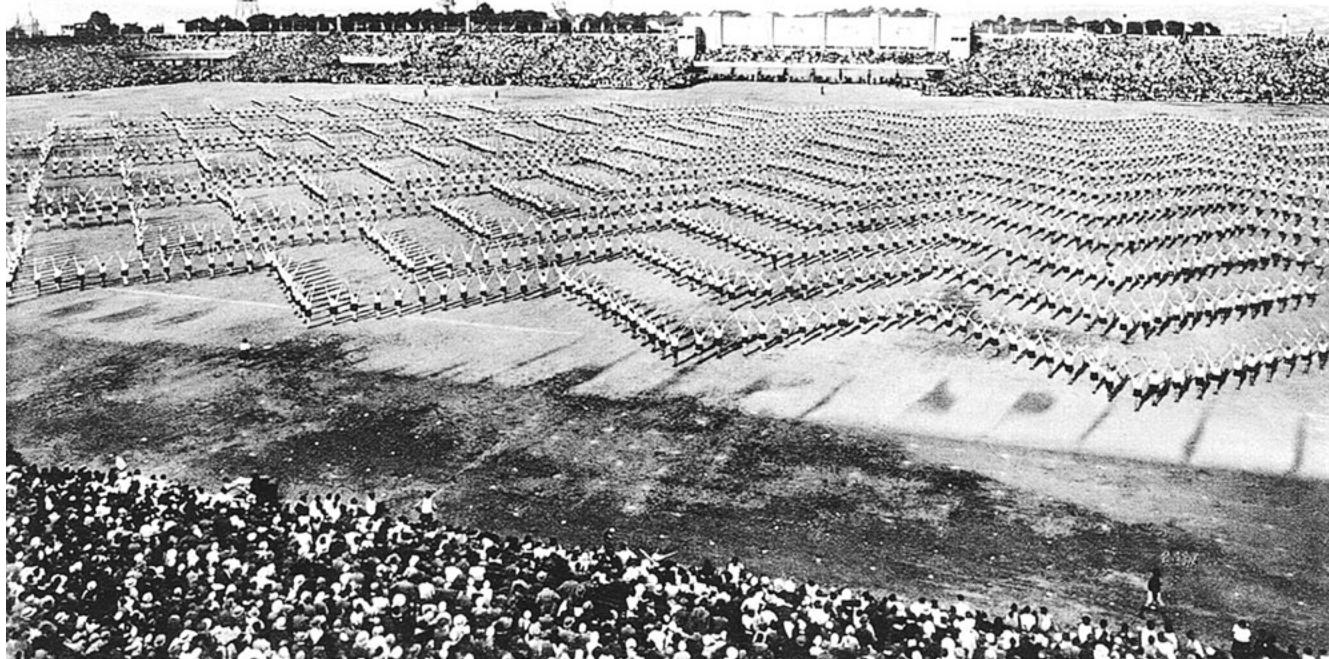
The Czech government, along with our Sokol organization, arranged a royal funeral and ceremony for this outstanding Sokol. On the coffin was placed only one ornament, a Sokol hat, that had been carried on a cannon named Lafeta. The funeral procession contained regular army units surrounded by their equipment, and behind the coffin marched 50 generals and about 400 other officers. The alliance of Slavic Sokols was represented by delegations from all the alliance members. ČOS had delegations representing its 53 districts, which were followed by a seemingly unending line of Sokol men and women.

On 16 January 1932, a service was arranged at the Pantheon of National Museum "Tryzna." The main speaker at this ceremony was the former professor of Komenský University, Dr. Albert Pražák, who was my former professor from my secondary school. Dr. Pražák was also Očenášek's brother-in-law and knew of his great

love for Sokol which he displayed over their many years of close relationship. He used humor to tell how he first met Scheiner when his fiancé took him to Scheiner's house to meet her brother and they discovered him in his garden with a spade in his hands. After the introductions, Scheiner excused himself and said he had some business to attend to and he would not Milada Malá be able to spend some time with the couple until the evening. Here it was in the afternoon and already he was obligated with Sokol duties elsewhere. Pražák looked at Scheiner in surprise and gushed out, "You have something to do with Sokol." The president threw down his spade, and, in an

indignant manner, said, "much more than anyone may think, I have something to do with Sokol."

Professor Albert Pražák was a member of a young student group which favored young Bohemian leaders. As a native of Bohemia, he identified Sokols with Dr. Pipich, the president of the eastern Czech district. Pražák, in his very lighthearted but still superior style of speech, related how, from his first meeting with his future brother-in-law, they developed a very long and close relationship. Pražák became both an ardent and loyal supporter of Sokol and its ideals as taught by Scheiner, which were always in the true context of the Tyrš system.



Women performing with Indian clubs during the 1926 Slet.



The Czechoslovak 1938 Men's World Championship Gymnastic Team.



## FROM THE IX TO THE X SLET (1932–1938)

### BEFORE THE STORM

Germany unilaterally discarded all the Versailles Treaty provisions, which allowed the rise of Adolf Hitler in 1933. In his book, *Mein Kampf*, Hitler clearly expressed his goals to rid Germany of all representatives of the non-Aryan races, and all Jewish inhabitants; then he planned to re-educate selected individuals from inferior or Slavic nations, and for all others, either extermination or forceful emigration to the east. After gaining control of all of Europe, the German Empire was proposed to last a thousand years. Of course, this was to be achieved under the leadership of Hitler. Today it is hard to conceive how the leaders of the other European nations could have chosen to either ignore or refuse to believe the contents of Hitler's book. Instead, they chose to retreat in the deceptive hope that the Germans would see through this crazy individual and free themselves of his leadership. With their silence, they encouraged Hitler to demand even more. He succeeded in fanaticizing the uneducated German masses and to capture the imagination of a majority of the educated elite of the country. In 1932, Germany elected Hitler as their imperial chancellor and in 1933, he became their absolute autocrat.

In Italy and Spain, fascist individuals came into leadership roles and the trend began spreading to other countries. Many politicians were deceived by these leaders because, through some radical social laws, unemployment was greatly reduced, and the countries seemed to have reached a high level of prosperity. However, with Mussolini in Italy and Hitler in Germany, the people were paying for this prosperity with a loss of democracy and their personal rights.

Like a bolt of lightning out of a clear blue sky, the news that Germany in 1934 signed a non-aggression

pact with Poland had a large impact on Czechoslovakia. By this pact, the plan of defense against Hitler was seriously weakened because the Sokols of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania had agreed to a mutual defense pact. It seems that Foreign Minister Beneš had counted on incorporating the Polish Sokols into the agreement, but it was not to be. Apparently, the Polish Sokols did not exercise the same type of political force in their country as existed in Czechoslovakia. In Poland, the real power existed with the Catholic church which, on occasion, had even prevented Sokols from participating in foreign, land activities. After the pact with Hitler was signed by Poland, the Polish Sokol leaders resigned their leadership roles in Sokol as a sign of their dissatisfaction with the pact. The new president of Polish Sokols was Frantisek Arciszewski, who promptly cancelled all preparations for the 1938 Slet.

Major unrest now prevailed throughout all central Europe. Once again, the idea of Slovakia separating from Bohemia and Moravia reared its head. The leader of the separation movement was a priest, Andrej Hlinka, who before the outbreak of WWI, had been very popular in Bohemia and Moravia. As a matter of fact, when Hungarian police shot into the crowds of strikers in Černovice, Hlinka was travelling in Bohemia, and he instigated protest meetings and other actions which reminded and encouraged a consciousness for branches of the original Slovak nation. In 1918, Hlinka became a leader of the Slovak portion of Czechoslovakia. He now positioned himself in an unfriendly role toward Czechoslovakia and championed the proposal to make Slovakia a separate nation. At the celebration of the 1,000th anniversary of the establishment of the first Christian church in Nitra by Prince Pribina, Hlinka, sup-

ported by an armed group, attempted to tear down the ceremonial stand. Thanks to the large number of Sokols participating in the celebration, his efforts were in vain, and a major collision was prevented.

### **INTERNAL DEVELOPMENT—1932–1938**

The entire period between Slets was now passing through two heavy shadows: the world-wide economic crisis and the threat of a second world war. The bankruptcy of the New York stock exchange in 1929 caused a world-wide chain reaction. By 1930, the reaction spread through the entirety of Europe. Unemployment reached unheard-of heights and out of it flowed both material and moral poverty. ČOS was forced to undertake extensive social actions requesting employed brothers to help those less fortunate. Along with these requests, innovative measures were devised to assist the needy. Fully one half of the eight million proceeds of the 1932 IX Slet was used to rescue endangered Sokol buildings and for many forms of social assistance. On the suggestion of the journalist and social critic, Karel Čapek, a nation-wide committee was formed called "Democracy for Children," with the objective of protecting those children who were endangered by hunger and moral misery.

Throughout Europe, during this same period, there was a dangerous spread of Italian style fascism which infiltrated the Sokol organization. Because of this political trend, the education staff decided to increase the democratic instruction for students. In addition, the ČOS board published a statement in a resolution at the VII convention, that Sokol ideals and fascism were incompatible, and that fascism would ultimately lead to unwanted dictatorship. Again, on the 10th anniversary of the VII convention a resolution was passed which explained in detail why fascism was not the way for Sokol. Unfortunately, the infection of fascism began penetrating the Sokol organization and the gymnastic and educational staff had to increase their teaching of democracy to counteract this trend. Despite this renewed effort, fascist influence existed in two of the highest positions in the Sokol organization. The Director of Men and the president did not understand their historic position and as soon as the opportunity presented itself, they demonstrated their desire to seize and hold power. In President Klinger it showed up first when he voted for Agathon Heller, as Director of Men, and then by frustrating

efforts of co-operation in joint programs. These events ended friendly co-operation between various elements of Sokol. Both brothers went too far when they tried to decrease the work load of the women instructors to the detriment of Sokol progress.

The instructor school was managed by a committee chaired by a senior instructor. When there was an opening for a permanent instructor, Klinger refused, until the last moment, to call for a committee meeting to pass on the new appointment. This delay resulted in having to call for a temporary appointment, without competition, to occupy the position until a meeting was held. The month passed and still no meeting was called, because the president refused to recognize the appointee. Because we could not close the schools, I invited the provisional instructor to teach. When the month was completed, the treasurer presented the pay order to the President, who refused to sign it. He stated that employment of the instructor had not been approved. In addition, I wrote on the same document that the instructor was to receive payment for the performed duties and that I was not responsible for the debt because the president had not convened a committee meeting. This situation resulted in angry feelings between President Bukovský and me, which caused a split that never healed.

Stanislav Bukovsky's presidency began in 1932 and ended with the German occupation in 1939. He introduced outgoing correspondence procedures, which contradicted normal democratic processes. For example, he insisted that all official correspondence leaving Tyrš House had to be presented for approval prior to dispatch. When it became apparent that he could not review all items, he passed the responsibility for review to the Slet secretary. This new procedure resulted in long delays. For example, when the secretary could not review the parcel of compulsory arrangements with directions for women's scoring guidelines, I was required to verbally transmit this information via telephone calls to the districts on the day of competition.

President Bukovský supported Klinger in all his attempts to limit women's roles in Sokol. Klinger also came into conflict with the general staff of the ministry of defense when he refused to make certain changes in Sokol that the Army was making in their marching and drill formation. The Army, through the general staff, modernized their marching and drill formations

by introducing a three-line basic formation. Initially, Sokol instructors refused to include these changes, but finally they incorporated them into the Sokol scheme of instruction.

Meanwhile, under Director of Men there was a gradual deterioration of gymnastic quality in summit training and international activities. Voices warning of this deterioration began to be heard throughout the organization. In the fall meeting of the men's instructional staff in 1936, a study on the development of apparatus training during the three years since the election of Klinger was presented. The report was crushing. Klinger's position as an official within the ministry of national defense also had steadily deteriorated until it became untenable. President Bukovský finally was able to arrange Klinger's transfer into the Ministry of Health.

Suddenly, the many trifles that had sneaked into the executive levels of the Sokol organization, causing it to become an autocratic organization, became a major problem. These trifles, which in themselves had seemed so inconsequential and which had not been opposed because of the desire for calm and peace, now demanded action. Many of the trifles, e.g., censorship of all outgoing mail, did not persist, so they were not brought to the attention of the committee formed to review the changes. Fortunately, there were brothers who adhered to the warnings of Tyrš to be ever vigilant in detecting things, which can ruin an organization.

The turmoil within the top elements of the Sokol organization lasted through two voting periods before the oversight committee realized that changes were necessary. In the election meeting in the spring of 1937, the voters rebuked some very distinguished members of the supervisory group as a direct rebuke of the president, who received only one vote more than a majority and by the next election in 1939, things had gotten so bad that both Klinger and Bukovský refused to be candidates for additional terms.

Meanwhile, the inter-development of physical and educational activities continued undisturbed by the power struggles at the higher levels of organization. In the fall meeting of 1938, both leaders of the board of instructors presented a common proposal for the coming year, based on close observation of activities in preparation for the Slet. It had been discovered that two thirds of the units were suffering shortages in the men's

division where membership numbers had fallen below 100, requiring close attention to this area and to the education of male instructors. The situation demanded immediate reforms to the program, the instruction, and the examinations in instructor schools.

The major problem in the men's division was to find a common and acceptable balance between the core activities of Sokol and the various athletic programs which, in the smaller units, were now occupying so much of the program's time. We had to maintain an instructor staff that would foster the proper level of Sokol education, and still allow activities that would enhance the Sokol movement, and at the same time satisfy and encourage other activities that would appeal to the members.

For the coming year of 1939, the educational staff for the junior programs directed their attention to activities that would appeal to both junior participants and to university students who had expressed interest in Sokol activities. With the threat of Hitler in the forefront of planning, the program for men and junior boys was militarily oriented in its design, whereas the goal of the program for women and junior girls was to prepare them to become the prime movers in community control and health related activities. We had no idea at the time how soon our new style of training would be used.

Twelve years later, when I was in the US, my daughter wrote that she and her whole family were in a fugitive camp in Germany. As a first item of help, I sent a standard "care" package, which among other items, contained a can of lard. Because the camp food lacked vitamins and fat, my daughter used lard, sprinkled with onions, as a spread on bread for the children. Despite the unpalatable taste of lard, my youngest granddaughter prayed each evening that the amount of lard in the can would not decrease.

Despite the economic difficulties and the international tensions, the Sokol gymnastic and cultural movement continued to grow and improve. Before the Olympic games in Berlin in 1936, Slavic Sokols conducted a school for judges separated into men's and woman's classes. These courses, conducted in Kástel Sučurac, Croatia, profoundly contributed to a standardized approach to all gymnastic judging, not only in Sokol competitions, but also in FIG (Federation of International Gymnastics) programs in the Olympic games. The experiences of Sokol women and especially,

their technical maturity, dominated the field in international women's gymnastics events during the first fifteen years of women's competitions.

The joys and success of the Sokol program received two very difficult blows in 1937. In February of that year, Renata Tyršová, the daughter of Fügner and the widow of Tyrš, died. This was followed in September by the death of T.G. Masaryk, who had retired in 1935, from the presidency. We awoke that September morning to the tolling of many bells announcing the sad news. This immediately plunged the entire nation into a state of deep mourning. His body laid in State at the Strahov Athletic Slet field, and the lines of mourners were never ending. This continued throughout the night to allow as many people as possible to bow for a last time to their beloved leader. The entire next day was spent in silent prayer and displays of love and gratefulness for this great man. Never or since has the entire nation been so united in their sharing of pain for their great loss.

We now entered a period where the foreign contacts by ČOS were strongly influenced by Hitler's expanding power and the spreading of his dictatorship throughout Europe. Relationships, however, remained friendly with Sokols in other countries, and with the French Federation of Feminist Societies. Undisturbed also was our continuing close relationship with both Sokol federations in America. We continued our mutual trips with the US, our hosting American students in our instructor's courses, and our distribution of literature to American Sokol units. While our relationships with the South-Slavic Sokols (SSS) remained very friendly and warm, we did lose some excellent brothers when they could not reconcile their loss of independence with the democracy of SSS.

## **RELATIONSHIPS WITH FOREIGN COUNTRIES—OLYMPIC GAMES**

**EDITORIAL COMMENT.** This section details some important contributions that the author and the Sokol organization made to women's international gymnastics. Moreover, the cooperation and interactions between nations, as well as the politics involved, are addressed.

The first international gymnastic organization was the European Gymnastics Federation, which was founded in 1883 in Paris by two Frenchmen. Starting in 1901 and continuing at two-year intervals, the organiza-

tion sponsored both team and individual gymnastic competitions for the European championship. ČOS first entered the competitions in 1907 after the V Slet and that year won the championship. In 1920, the organization changed its name to the Federation of International Gymnastics (FIG).

In January 1932, FIG chairman, Cazalet, died and soon his first deputy chairman, Sokol's Dr. Scheiner, also died. In recognition of his many contributions to FIG, Dr. Scheiner was elected "in memorial" chairman of FIG for one year and during this period, his work was performed by the first deputy chairman, Count Adam Zamoyski of Poland. At the same election meeting, the daughter-in-law of the Count, the Countess Jadwiga Zamoyski, who was the senior Polish women's instructor, proposed that women, as well as men, should compete in Budapest the following year. The proposal was accepted and the preparation for women's competition was entrusted to a commission of three men, with Sister Zamoyski as chairperson. This was the first and last time that men were involved in preparing the routines for international women's competition. Membership on the first FIG technical commission consisted of leading ČOS instructors of the Federation of Polish Sokols and the South-Slavic Sokols because they were the only gymnasts with experience leading large gymnastic units.

At the FIG competitions in Budapest, for the first time in men's competition, Germany was represented. Hitler had stated that the German men were participating with victory assured. As it worked out, the Germans had to be satisfied with third, as the Swiss took first place, and the Czechoslovaks took second.

The women were not satisfied with the outcome of the special men's commission for women's competition, but they competed anyway. By participating in the competitions, the women were assured that they would be able to influence future FIG competitions. At Budapest the ČOS women opted to compete on the uneven bars and the balance beam. In these events, the Czechoslovak women finished first, followed by Hungary, Poland, France, and Bulgaria. From these competitions, we were able to demand that hence forth, women should prepare, direct and judge future events. Because the Sokol women were the only experienced instructors in women's gymnastics, we were able to dominate the future competitions. Moreover, for these other elements, it became nec-

essary for us to educate others in gymnastic techniques and judging.

Another major problem FIG had to resolve was the extreme nationalism in international competition. We discovered that a Hungarian, who had been entrusted with transferring points on competitive charts to a permanent record, was changing the scores. The woman was promptly expelled, and we considered the situation as a warning of things to come.

In 1935, FIG established the first women's technical commission in Brussels and elected Sister Zamoyska as president, and Sister Provazníková as secretary. The first task of this commission was to prepare the gymnastic competitions for the 1936 Olympic Games to be held in Berlin. This task increased interest in women's competitions and to some degree, detracted from the male domination of gymnastics.

Initially, the inclusion of women's competitions in gymnastics met with resistance, but finally the Olympic committee agreed to allow women to compete, but only at the team level with no individual competition allowed. After much debate, the apparatus events were accepted mainly because they are exclusively women's events. Because of the experience of Sokol women in these events, it was felt they would have an indisputable advantage over the other competitors. However, the long lead time until the Olympics was adequate to equalize the capability of all participants. Therefore, the Olympic governing committee approved the proposed events.

Soon after the announcement concerning the compulsory Olympic events, we received a request from the German Turnverein for permission to send some women gymnasts to Prague to receive instruction on the apparatus. We were happy to invite the Germans, and when several gymnasts and an instructor arrived, we gladly welcomed them. As soon as they arrived on the gym floor, they ran to the beam and began taking measurements of its dimensions. The width of the beam as only eight centimeters (this was later increased to 10 centimeters) and the Germans were surprised that gymnastic movements were performed on such a narrow beam. They asked us to demonstrate what we could do on the beam. The gym floor was full of our gymnasts, so I called some of them over to the apparatus and asked them to demonstrate some typical movements. The

German girls were completely astonished at the demonstration, as the apparatus with our dimensions was completely new to them.

Following the constitutional meeting of the women's technical commission, Chairperson Zamoyska became critically ill with tuberculosis and went to the French Riviera for treatment. She announced that for the period of her illness, she would not be able to participate in the preparation for the Olympics. The entire responsibility for Olympic preparation now fell on my shoulders but I was ably assisted by my Sokol women instructors. The work was not limited, as we had to prepare compulsory routines for the competitions, and translate them into the official international tongue, namely French. Moreover, I provided photographs of the main movements within the routines, and directions for the judges, and an analysis of the arrangement. After her recovery, Sister Zamoyska became pregnant, so her leave of absence was extended to the start of the Berlin Olympics. Her absence was both unwelcome and unpleasant, because at this same time, we were preparing for the X Slet. All workers taking part in the preparations were pushed to the limits of their capabilities.

We were finally able to reduce the number of women competitors who would represent ČOS at the Olympics to 10. These select few were then put through a very strenuous period of training at Tyrš House in Prague. During this time the weather was extremely hot, and Klinger frustrated our efforts through his opposition to our program. I decided we had to find a smaller facility where there would be a more conducive atmosphere in which to conduct our training. Our women gymnasts were retrogressing rather than improving in their performances and their morale was low.

Markela Minaříková, from Černošice (a town in Prague's West District), an agile women's instructor, put herself into a position where she could improve the situation and briefed members of the Černošice unit. She was so persuasive in describing our problem that the unit invited the team into their gym as guests so they could prepare for the Olympics. The entire unit was so proud to be able to help that they showered the team members with love and sincere affection. Within a few days, the results of the change in location and support became very apparent. The gym-

nasts began to blossom, and the training improved in greatly. Preparing these gymnasts placed a very heavy burden on me. This was also true for the pianist, who travelled with me from Prague to Černošice each day. However, the results of this large effort were more than manifested in the results that were obtained. The team travelled to Berlin fully prepared and in excellent condition.

I knew that in the Olympics we faced two very formidable foes, the Hungarians who set very high standards for themselves, and the Germans, who, under Hitler's government, wanted to win all the top prizes in their Olympics. We also knew that the non-Sokol women judges at the Olympics were both untrained and ignorant in the skills of fairly grading the various competitors. Lída Pešková became very angry during the grading because some judges failed to adequately reward a gymnast who had performed a very difficult and flowing routine. The American delegate, Dr. Brown, became so disgusted that she withdrew the American team from participating in the award ceremony. The German and Hungarian judges proved to be very biased in their grading of the gymnasts, but despite these conflicts, I felt that the women's gymnastics portion of the Olympics was a big success because of many expressions of cooperation and love. How did the ČOS team make out? According to the audience, they were the best, but we had to settle for second place.

The 1936 Berlin Olympic Games revealed strong motives of the German involvement in the International Gymnastics Federation. Hitler had invested huge sums of money for the game's preparations to show the wealth, strength, and the power of Nazi Germany. In this objective, he succeeded. From that time on, other nations of the world have used the Olympic Games to enhance their own national image. In 1936, Hitler used the games as a camouflage for his true intentions for world conquest. For the first time a breach was made into the amateur status of participants when, on the field, Hitler pompously promoted an officer who had won an athletic event and announced that the officer was to be awarded the gift of a home. Soon after the games, the democratic Turnvereins (the German gymnastics organization) were disbanded and the Nazis organized their gymnastics programs exclusively dedicated to the victory of the empire they created.

### Romania

When King Carol succeeded to the throne, he established, as one of his objectives, higher standards for education and the physical status of his subjects. To accomplish this objective, he sent experts to other European countries to study their schools and physical training methods. When the experts returned to their own countries to evaluate the various systems, they all agreed that the perfect training program was Czechoslovakia's Sokol system. King Carol then decided to adopt the Sokol system and asked us for cooperation and support in introducing the Sokol system into Romanian society. To lay out the groundwork to implement such a plan, Br. Klinger and I were invited to Romania for a few days, at which time our Romanian hosts acquainted us with the beautiful folk art.

A plan evolved from our trip to teach the Romanians the Sokol system of gymnastics at special classes to be conducted at Tyrš House in Prague. These classes were to be taught using the French language as a common communication tool. We had a few sisters who were very conversant in the language, so we were able to maintain a high standard of education in these classes. We also established a close relationship with Msgr. Zavoral, who was highly respected in Romania, and supportive of our program. Our undergraduates succeeded in gaining an audience with the monsignor, and he then invited them to a reception in the Strahov Monastery.

The friendship between Czechoslovakia and Romania deepened almost to the extent of brotherhood. Our instructor's board members were learning Romanian to facilitate better understanding between our groups. In 1936 we also prepared a large tour of Romania where we would present a major gymnastics program on a large training field. However, our plans were frustrated when the main platform on the field collapsed. The next year our trip was characterized by great enthusiasm and a large contingent from ČOS. In 1936, King Carol with Prince Michael visited Prague where we conducted a large exhibition at Tyrš House in his honor. On this occasion, the King presented me with a highly honored Romanian decoration.

On the next day, following the exhibition, there was a large national reception in the president's castle, which caused me some embarrassment. Initially, I had not been invited, but apparently, someone in the pro-

tocol office found out I had been awarded the decoration. So, on the morning of the reception, October 28, a special messenger hand-carried an invitation to me. The invitation called for men to be dressed in white ties and wear their decorations, which implied that women should wear long evening gowns. Because October 28 is a national holiday (commemoration of the founding of Czechoslovakia in 1918) and all stores were closed, I was not able to buy a long gown. Fortunately, I had a piece of black velvet which was enough for a dressmaker to make a long sleeveless gown. So now I had a dress, but did not know what was I going to do about the decorations. I could not see myself walking around with a chest full of foreign medals.

I solved the problem by carrying all my medals in my handbag. The first person I met at the reception was Františka Plamínková, the deputy chairwoman of the National Council of Women, a well-known feminist and teacher who became a journalist. She had a critical look on her face and asked, "Where are your medals?" When I admitted they were in my handbag, she almost fainted. "The only woman in the republic who has medals and she had them in her handbag," she stated. "Hurry, go and pin them on." In the lady's room I put on the Yugoslav decoration of Saint Sava, a medal of second class, which means it is worn on a ribbon around the neck. The light blue ribbon worn with a pointed low-cut gown looked beautiful. On the left side I pinned the French medal for physical training, and the Estonian medal. I could not wear the new Romanian medal because it would have required me to make a hole through my new dress. This medal was in the form of a cross, but I never learned its name.

Events were to proceed with alarming speed, and I never again wore the splendid medals. Within two years, the sell-out at Munich was with us and we endured Protectorate status and then war. (**Editorial note.** The author refers to the takeover of Bohemia and Moravia by Hitler's Army, a topic covered in detail later). Finally, the brotherly army of General Radion Malinovsky liberated us, and I was able to recover some of my medals which I had hidden in a mill near our villa in Rendlíček. Of all the medals, only the Saint Sava remained because I had kept it in my Prague apartment. After the war, the French government replaced my Honorable Legion medal, but only after I was able to send the necessary gold for its production.

After the Romanian King's visit, an even closer cooperation between our two nations proceeded with exchanges of visits by key personnel and the exchange of undergraduates in our instructor schools. We also arranged various camps for junior boys as a means of establishing closer relationships between junior boys of different nations. Moreover, we sent a sister to Romania to lead a school there dedicated to training future camp leaders.

### ***The Meeting with the President***

Miroslav Klinger, who was Director of Men since 1933, proposed that ČOS send an expedition of 800 men to the 1936 Olympics to perform a calisthenic drill like the drills performed at Sokol Slets. That same year, Sokol had plans to send a group of Sokols to Slovakia where Slovak leader Hlinka had started a separatist movement for dissolving the Czechoslovak union. I stood firmly against the Olympic proposal for I felt that any propaganda benefit we would achieve would be negated by the propaganda programs sponsored by the Nazi movement. I knew nothing could outdo the effort that would be presented by Germany. I knew the audience would consist mainly of sportsmen who were interested mainly in one thing — how many medals were won by the various countries. I considered it was more important to support the Slovak effort as a democratic defense against Hlinka's movement. The ČOS president supported the Klinger plan, but then in a board meeting, many others agreed with my opposition, and the ČOS president suggested we ask President Beneš for his views. Apparently, none of us were aware that President Beneš had more weight in decision-making than any other Sokol. After all viewpoints were presented, Beneš supported the Klinger plan. During the conversations, it soon became a duel between the president and me as to which would be the proper course of action. When I insisted on presenting my viewpoint, and he had considered its merits, he stated that from a propaganda standpoint, "I could go to hell." Naturally, President Beneš' views carried considerable weight, so that at the next ČOS board meeting, the Klinger proposal was approved. Through this action, my activity ceased because the Klinger plan only involved men. However, the Sokol and non-Sokol press now began to express their views. Previously the applications to travel to Berlin counted on

ČOS to provide money for the trip, but now at the spring meeting, ČOS decided that travel would be paid in the same manner as when participants attended regular Slet activities.

## THE 1938 X SLET

**EDITORIAL COMMENT.** The preparations, success, and aftermath of the 1938 Slet must be understood in context of the inevitable World War II. The determination of the Czechoslovak citizens, and especially the Sokol membership, to demonstrate their commitment to the values of the new Republic were embraced in the Sokol movement. By 1939, Bohemia and Moravia were Protectorates of Nazi Germany, i.e., German occupation; Sokol's demise followed closely in 1941. The 1938 Slet represented a clear statement by the Sokols that their country was a democracy supported by its citizens. The thousands of participants in the Slet revealed their training and discipline and is explained in the minute details, documented in this section. Had the allies not given in to Hitler's demands, the Czechs were willing to resist the German occupation.

The preparations for the X Slet became more troublesome than ever before. The Sokol answer to the larger problems was to increase preparation efforts. Unemployment still had a lasting effect throughout the country, so Sokol answered the challenge by adopting a 23 million crown budget for the event. In response to the increased qualms concerning the war threats, Sokol answered by deepening their moral and ideal concepts of education. In the Spring of 1937, the ČOS committee called for an army conscription rally at all Sokol districts and units. Over one half million men and junior boys, as well as 98,350 junior girls, responded to the alert. Chief of the General Staff, General Boček, welcomed the participants to the event.

At the Slet, and before the grand lineup and parade, the Czechoslovak Philharmonic Orchestra performed, for the first time, the new Suk's march titled "Into a New Life." The music was accompanied by a mixed choir of Jaroslav Křička.

### **Before the Slet relay race**

Because of President Masaryk's death, the race was postponed until October 27 and 28. It started at Tyrš' House and radiated throughout the country to all districts and units. The runners all carried the message "The Tenth Slet will take place; everyone to your places; all to the

defense of the country and to complete the building of a free, democratic and socially just Republic." I oversaw a part of the race along the longest railroad track, which ended at the Romanian border. Assisting me were two women instructors. The task was not easy. We provided relay runners of junior girls who alternated with junior boys under the supervision of a men's instructor. With sister Vokáč, we overtook the relay at Vrútky, in Northern Slovakia on the next day, and we traveled by car to Jasiňa in East Slovakia (now in Ukraine). It took us over an hour to buy gas, and we had to hurry to catch up to the relay. Initially, we passed the burned-out fires along the road. But then, we began passing the active fires, which formed a magical passage through the dark woods on a dark night. On the road at regular intervals, the little fires warmed the runners waiting for the relay to arrive at their point. Everywhere we were welcomed by the shining eyes of the junior boys and girls eager to include themselves into the 130,000-member chain of runners carrying the Slet call. That unfailing regularity of performance, even in the sparsely inhabited parts of the land, that desire to be a part of the action, and the enthusiasm of the youngsters, were all elements of an abiding faith in the future of Sokol and our country. Equally supportive of the effort were the vast numbers of individuals who took care of the runners and saw to their security.

To be included at the mass meeting of the Sokol units, ČOS sent the following New Year's message: "For freedom and democracy we are working, and if needed, we will fight and die." That was the motto of the tenth Slet. The broadcasting of Slet instructions and training requirements was adopted to a sonnet with the words: "For Freedom and Democracy."

### **Winter Slet Games**

The winter Slet games, held for the first time, occurred in Slovakia's High Tatra Mountains. All Sokol entities, associated with the South Slavic Sokols, took part. Prior to the time for the opening of our summer Slet, the nation was rocked by two major events initiated by Hitler and his drive for the conquest of Europe. These events were: Nazi Germany, on March 14, 1938, occupied Austria and promptly dissolved the small ČOS district of lower Austria, along with confiscation of their small fortune. The second event occurred on 21 May 1938 when, because of intelligence information, Czechoslovakia declared a

partial mobilization, which affected many Sokols, who were preparing for Slet participation. While the mobilization was called to repel an anticipated German attack, Slet preparations and all activities continued.

The 1938 Slet included both small boys and girls for the first time. Over 24,000 small boys participated, but only 16,000 small girls were in attendance. The difference in the numbers was caused by the women instructors who insisted that small girls be invited only from those districts which were close enough for the girls to return home on the same day. In contrast to these stipulations, the small boys were invited from units throughout the Republic.

From June 26 through 29, 1938, the Slet included the younger generations of the Sokol movement when 24,000 boys and 33,000 girls performed their drills. Most successful were the junior girls, who performed a graceful composition written by Božena Nemcová. Not only were the movements fluid and graceful, but the piece was enhanced by blue-colored ribbons and a wreath of yellow flowers, which were used in the closing portions of the drill. Equally successful were some dances performed under the guidance of sister Vokáčová, who had trained 4,800 of the older junior girls and dressed them in very festive costumes.

The portion of the Slet performed by the small boys was not only shorter than the girl's portion, but also consisted of more simple formations. The shortcomings of Klinger's leadership became very apparent. The demonstrations by the junior boys misfired when the boys had to return to the formation and repeat their line-up, because of misalignments. Unfortunately, this occurred during the period while the junior girls were in line awaiting their turn to enter the arena.

At this same time the weather, which had been very threatening, now turned to a steady rain which the junior girls had to endure while they stood in line for hours waiting for the boys to finish their portion of the exhibition. Suddenly, the storm caused some items to fall on the road, which was next to where the girls were waiting. At this moment, Klinger almost started to panic, when in a very excited voice, he, using the general amplifying system, called for the health and emergency elements to provide for rescue teams and an ambulance.

The leader of the women telephoned me that girls were crying in fear that their parents had been injured

as they sat in the members section of the stands. I took the microphone and quickly assured the girls that no one had been injured. This action served to put at rest the girls' fears, and they became calm. Additionally, the members sitting in their special section responded to my calming influence with a round of applause.

Because Klinger had grossly exceeded his agreed time for the boys' rehearsal, and as the girls were now numb from the cold, I sent them back to their dressing rooms to wait for further orders. There was now little time for the girls' lunch, so I requested that the kitchen prepare tea. I also had another problem. The girls' instructors had prepared a new and untried method of lining up and assembling the girls on the field so, I had promised to explain the new procedure to all before the formal line-up. Unfortunately, events conspired against us. The girls were in the dressing rooms when I received a telephone call from the Czechoslovak Chancellor.

Chancellor Smutný informed me that the president would like to attend the Slet that afternoon and he wanted to know the time at which he should arrive. The visit was to be unofficial. I knew the boys were to perform after the junior girls. I selected a time when the girls were in formation on the field standing on their marks. The Chancellor told me how many minutes were needed for the president to make the trip to the Slet field and then directed that I should call him, as a reminder, at the suggested time of departure.

While we had been discussing the president's visit, the Slet field became filled with visitors, and I knew it would be impossible for me to pass through the crowds of people to rehearse the girls in their new formation in the time available. My troubles were still not over. The president's arrival was a little late and the girls were still in their entry column formations. I stopped the music to give the command to open ranks, when suddenly the president's flag was raised on the flagpole and all the people responded by welcoming the president with their applause. When the applause stopped, I forgot my good intentions and gave an improper command for the girls to open ranks. It appears an electric shock went through the girls and 15,000 girls responded at once to a correct opening of ranks. Such were our junior girls.

An instructor's lack of leadership reflects more when the chips are down. When it became apparent that the men's instructor had under-calculated the number of

dressing rooms the men would need, he told the brothers to occupy the women's dressing rooms. When the men informed him that the women had their clothes there, he directed them to throw their things outside. Klinger insisted there were problems with the audio system, so the sound engineers sent some scouts on the field. The problem was solved when the instructor's staff sent Brother Pechlát onto the instructor's bridge to stand behind Klinger and prompt him on how to formulate the proper command.

Finally, the men could form in Pecháček's double formation on the Slet field. This type of formation also has a history of its own. From the time when we were able to put as many participants as possible and we had markers on the field, I longed to double that number and be able to have all the boys and girls on the field simultaneously. I knew that the foreign correspondents did not believe our numbers, so I sought a way to double even these unbelievable numbers. Our women's instructors group tried to develop a way in which we could accomplish this task but we had no success. Klinger tried to explain to everyone that such a proposal was insane, as no-one on the field would have adequate air and that all the junior girls would faint. The women designers of mass formation did not want to risk such a possibility and acknowledged Klinger's objections by cancelling further work on the plan. We then accepted Sister Matějková's proposal to limit the field to one participant per marker. Shortly thereafter I learned that Klinger had ordered Pecháček, an instructor at the Sokol school, to develop a plan to accommodate 10,000 men. I must admit that Klinger's scheme succeeded.

In June, 1937, I visited a public exhibition by Sokol Vinohrady (in Prague) gymnasts in which a special dance number by gymnasts utilized some unique and novel formations. I called author Božena Nemcová and told her that something like this approach was what I had in mind. The participants had moved their markers into various formations with a freedom that could only be controlled by intelligent cooperation on the part of all participants. I asked her to develop something similar for 30,000 women. Shortly thereafter, Božena and her husband surprised us with a plan which exceeded all our expectations. The first part of the drill was to be performed in a customary style, even though the formation was unusual. The second part required the girls to divide

into a four wedge shaped formation and then perform part two of the drill. In the third part, they broke out of the wedges and formed a land mass surrounding an empty space meant to resemble a lake with an island in the center. All these formations were performed without benefit of specific markers. On the command: "On markers take possession," each gymnast moved to the nearest marker and assumed a kneeling position. Of course, there were not enough markers for all, so on a second command, those without a marker position quickly left the field. The gymnasts who occupied the markers now performed in short arrangements and then they assembled into streams of 55-person fronts and marched from the field. After a period of hesitation caused by such a drastic change in formations, which require strong co-operation by all participants, the plan was accepted, and small-scale trials were held in the district Slets.

Doubts about the new concepts, of course, remained. The greatest doubter of all was Br. Havel. He came to me and said "You know, I am not trying to get involved in your area of responsibility, but I think your new formations are wrong and they could spoil the whole Slet. You cannot succeed because when you give the command to move to the markers, the sisters will not accept finding an empty marker and will fight over possession of a marker." I did not believe him because I was sure that the Sokol education and discipline of the individual would govern their actions. But I thought it over because Brother Havel had been a fatherly friend of the first women's instructor corps, and I did not want to disregard his opinion. Finally, I came to a solution. If at the rehearsal I saw even the slightest indication of fighting for markers, I would immediately give the command of "attention, forehead back, depart by all gates, march." and I felt it would be a graceful way to depart the field. Fortunately, I did not need to use the alternate plan, because some of the Sokol novices wanted to witness the number instead of participating in it. Only 28,000 women participated, and the result exceeded all expectations. The constantly changing formations on the field, the alterations in rhythms, the freedom of movements ending with a merry polka, accompanied by flying scarves and at the then, rigid order emerging from utter chaos, all contributed to a massive success. Then when the 55-person front streams marched to the exits with their strawberry-red handkerchiefs on a sea of cream white smocks and began disap-

pearing under the gate of victors, I could not hold back my tears.

Suddenly something moved on my right; it was chancellor Přemysl Šámal who had run across the roof of the stadium from the President's Box to enthusiastically clasp me into his arms. To the president, he later reported that in his eighteen years he had never given such a kiss as he gave to me as the women's director. When he released me from his grasp, I looked back to where I had two special guests, the chairman and the chief instructor of the French male gymnasts. Their emotion was so great and the tears so many that they were unable to speak.

ČOS then presented a bronze statuette "Republic" to our President Masaryk. The statuette had been made by the sculptor Brůha. In turn, he gave us a flag made by sister Martínková in an artistic style and design.

Even a brief glance would have disclosed that this Slet was conducted under the dark influences of the threat of war. To this threat was added the inner pressure brought to bear by some autocratic individuals situated in high positions in our organization. Fortunately, both threats were negated by the devotion, dedication and hard work of our membership and the board of instructors.

I had a dream that the actual connection of war threat to the example of Sokol spirit and unity combined to forge the nation into one body dedicated to the preservation of the nation. That dream was how the situation appeared to be on the home front and how the foreign journalists saw the situation.

In our long column of participants that marched onto the Slet field, we had a most eloquent group of Sokols from Vienna. The only way they received permission from their government to participate was that they had to carry a Nazi flag. Because we feared for the safety of the individuals carrying the flag, we had policemen escort the group to protect them from possible attack by some of the visitors.

Rising above all the obstacles and difficulties, which were unknown to the public, the results of the 1938 Slet far exceeded all previous Slets. The highest and most valuable contribution of the Slet was the moral and physical values displayed by our Sokols. These attributes combined with the unquestionable loyalty and determination of Sokols to defend liberty and democracy and served to bind the nation into a single dedicated force. As we moved along the road toward our dark future, it

reminded us of Hera's poetic guide in the Slet's film which stated, "We are going, we are going, we will not forget the nation."

## JUNIOR GIRLS TOUR TO DIJON AND PARIS

The French Feminine Federation was an unusual organization. As its name designated, it was intended to be for young girls and women, but all the instructors and coaches were men. The head instructor was George Demarbre, the professor for physical education in a Paris school. I do not know how he became aware of the Sokol organization, but by that time the Sokol unit in Paris had acquired a good reputation among French gymnasts. As a professional, Demarbre was interested in the concept of the Sokol idea and the effectiveness of Sokol teachings. In 1936 and 1937, during his vacation, he rented a country cottage next to Tyrš' House where he could look out upon the field used for gymnastics. Through his window, viewing the field or in the gym, he became aware of our program used to instruct future teachers of Sokol ideas. He often visited a restaurant, "Old Armory," where he conversed with these future instructors in French, building upon his knowledge regarding the ideals of Sokol. On his second or third visit, he became acquainted with Jiri Seyba, who was the leader of the French units, foreign section. Jiri drove him around to the various units locally, where he enjoyed many experiences, which enabled him to write two books, one of which notes the importance of the teaching of physical training and in which he cites Czechoslovakia as the good example.

At the beginning of the Slet year, the French Feminine Federation invited us to their congress, which was to be held during July in Dijon, the historical Burgundy region in Eastern France, as a part of a nation-wide celebration of the anniversary of that city. ČOS was unable to participate as our own Slet was absorbing all the time and efforts of our members.

Mr. Demarbre came to Prague at the beginning of the exhibition of small boys and informed us that Colonel Leccoq would arrive in Prague on the day of the mass exhibition to give me a medal of the Honorable Legion. He told me that at that time, he will ask, in the name of his government, "to send a team of junior girls to participate in the congress at Dijon. You cannot refuse this request!" In vain I tried to explain that I did not have the authority to acquiesce and that it would have to be

decided by my superiors. By this time, it was already too late, as the junior girls were returning home from Prague and there was not enough time to prepare. He repeated that we could not refuse such a request.

It was a delicate situation for me because the congress was scheduled to start in three weeks, and this meant that many tasks were required, including informing the participants, getting their applications filled out, providing the drill instructions, teaching them, and arranging the details of the trip. The board and the instructors agreed to this request on one condition, i.e., that the organization would only pay the expenses for the delegation and the junior girls would be responsible for their own expenses.

On Monday the daily newspapers printed the announcement of the tour and the conditions for taking part. In addition to the usual recommendations and a doctor's report that were required of each junior girl, she would also need a written confirmation of her participation in the Slet. Moreover, she must have been awarded at least 75 points in competition and was capable of a competitive showing in Dijon. Other requirements included that each girl provide two gym outfits, a proper Sokol uniform, and an authentic Czechoslovak kroj (costume). Prior to departure, attendance at a week-long training session was required. By the end of the week, we registered 92 girls. Sister Matějková and her husband composed the three compositions to be performed, and three weeks later the delegation was in Dijon.

A large crowd at the station welcomed us, including a delegation of tailor's masters and a group of Bohemian students studying at Dijon's Lyceum. Because we knew that all the girls did not speak French, we devised the plan to have them walk through the streets, in formation, accompanied by singing. They created quite a sensation, with people coming from all sides. When they stopped singing, the crowd shouted out "vas chanson" (our songs).

In addition to the evening academy, the organizers scheduled an exhibition by the junior girls in the city's stadium. The main event of the program was the performance of "Yellow Flowers" and our national dance, performed in their Czechoslovak costumes. When Mr. Demarbre introduced the girls, he gave a brief, but enthusiastic, description of the Czechoslovak Sokol. He told the audience that when he saw the girl's performance back in Prague, the women in the audience had

greeted the girls by waving white scarves, which every well-dressed woman at that time wore. The people of Dijon joyfully accepted this explanation and were happy to do the same. The French press declared that the performance of the Czechoslovak junior girls had been the high point of the celebration. This meant very good public relations for Czechoslovakia, which, at that time, was particularly necessary.

During the march from the stadium, I had been informed of the importance of the Order of Legion of Honor in France. As we strolled among the audience assembled there, a man burst into tears because he wanted to see the lady who received the Legion of Honor. Much later at a gathering in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the America authoress, Mrs. Mitchell, who wrote the biography of Alice Masaryk, asked me what the ribbon in the buttonhole of my costume represented. When she learned it was the French Legion of Honor, she called all present to see this woman, perhaps the only one, who had been given this honor. I gradually learned what a great honor it was. At the same time, I realized this honor did not belong to the individual who had been waving the flag on the Slet's podium, but that it belonged to an entire nation, currently in a serious political endeavor to remain free.

We, of course, could not have gone to France and not seen Paris. The Paris Sokol arranged a performance in the Saint Mande District. As the juniors were gathering in the square before the town hall, the mayor, Mr. Mege, an exporter who had studied at the commercial academy in Prague, greeted them from the balcony. Because Br. Matijošević always had his record player and the records for their drill with him, the junior girls could repeat their exercise wherever they went, e.g., on the grass of the Versailles Park, in Jardin de Lutece, in the Roman amphitheater, and in the middle of the working-class district. Even today, a half-century later, I still see some of the junior girls from that time and we still emotionally recall that happy time.

During our stay in Paris, I was a guest of Mayor Mege. As we listened to the radio, we heard the French station broadcasting the news that France and England had agreed to send Lord Runciman to Czechoslovakia as an arbitrator of our fate. Mayor Mege could not understand how devastating it was to see the fate of our nation being in the hand of one man, and particularly one who did

not know anything about Czechoslovakia. This was how all the democratic nations in Europe saw our nation — expendable. It was an icy shower after all the joy of the Slet and the trip. (**Editorial note.** The so-called “arbitrator” of our fate was part of the French and British signing the Munich Agreement which allowed Hitler to annex part of Czechoslovakia).

## AFTER THE SLET

**EDITORIAL COMMENT.** This section reveals the fearsome atmosphere in Czechoslovakia in the Fall of 1938 as Hitler was preparing for Germany's expansion. The 1938 Slet was a strong statement of the country's desire for independence and democracy, yet Czechoslovakia fate was not in its own hands.

Before the Slet, I had been fully occupied preparing the tour of our junior girls to France. After returning home, I departed with the first assistant instructor for a much-needed rest at the spa at Jáchymov, near Karlovy Vary (Carlsbad). From there we drove to Zlín (in Southeastern Moravia) for an interim Slet gathering called by Antonín Krejci. There we met more than 120 people from all regions who helped organize Slets. Our agenda was to review the last Slet and develop a plan. In the debate on the future undertaking, a consensus was reached to concentrate on themes including democracy, the nation and the constitution, and a strict standard for workers and their education. Also, we wanted to raise the level of education of new members, and finally, and most important, to educate the new youth.

After I returned from Zlín, I arranged for my daughter's friend to instruct me on driving a car. When we drove to the airport to take advantage of the empty roads, we came upon an excited crowd being directed by a social worker and member of the city council in Prague. When I inquired as to what was happening, she joyfully welcomed me, saying, “You have a car here and you must help us.” She explained that the crowd was German democrats who were running from the area near the border and away from the rampaging Henleins (Konrad Henlein was a Sudeten German politician). We had to help them until things improved. All night I ferried these German refugees to the addresses given me by the Czech social democrats. Suddenly, from an inspiring atmosphere of the Sokols, I found myself involved in the accelerating anxieties of our nation.

The board of women instructors met every week to prepare ourselves for impending events. Růžena Mačhalová, the third assistant instructor, came regularly to bring us up to date about events in Třebíč, Moravia. It was said that there was a teacher who was clairvoyant and when asked, in those emotional September days, how it would all end, he said there would be no war, but for Czechoslovakia it would turn out badly. We did not take him too seriously; if the worst came to us, it had to mean war; if war was not in the future, we would be okay. After Munich, we remembered him and asked what would happen now. He answered that it will not remain as demanded. Hitler will ask for more and the boundaries will move steadily until the beginning of December. Then there will be relative calm until the 15th of March when a disaster will happen that will be worse than the tragedy of White Mountain. We did not realize that the boundaries were already constantly changing, that Hitler already occupied part our land in Western Bohemia, where only a small number of Germans lived, leaving the Czech language to be preserved only in a small portion of the country. But conditions were such that we did not have time to spend worrying about the prediction. In December we received his newest prediction, that on the 25th, our nation would suffer a tremendous cultural loss. We all tried to decipher who it might be among the politicians and higher-level government members, but we were at a loss to find the answer. On Dec. 25th, the news broadcast did not contain any mention of a loss. The teacher from Třebíč had been so excited and apprehensive, he had to take a walk to calm down before listening to the last news of the evening. This late news brought us great distress; it foretold the famous Czech journalist Karel Čapek's death. The fulfillment of the prophecy reminded us of all the prophecy of March 15th, which we had already forgotten.

Due to our involvement with the Slet preparations from the 15th of June to the 15th of September, Sokol President Bukovský did not call any meetings of the board. Consequently, only a few people had been appointed to carry on the work and they were people who had not been involved with the Slet.

The explanation given to us was that our organization lost faith and guidance, bringing about such a lack of leadership and confusion that the situation appeared hopeless. During this confusion, it became possible for

some members who were inclined to operate Sokol as a dictatorship to come into power. The board of ČOS was called into an extraordinary session on October 23, solely for the purpose of requesting that the government acquaint the Sokol representative of decisions concerning important affairs. The board again notified its governmental agency about contradictions in the resolutions of the seventh mass meeting of Congress. This request was denied and there followed many more requests.

At this dangerous point in our history, there were clubs created within Sokol which focused on political activities and peasantry subjects. They wore distinguishing shirts of various colors to identify their units. These units joined the Federation of Civil Alert; ČOS was represented by Br. Kavalír. He quickly worked via his writings and other activities to unite all gymnastics training and sports under the federation. This effort was undertaken without the knowledge or approval of ČOS, the only competent organization qualified to undertake such a task.

Each instructional committee of ČOS spent much time analyzing the results of the Slet. All strengths and weaknesses were debated and while the public was unaware of the many mistakes that were made in coordinating the numerous elements and activities, we were aware of our shortcomings and took steps to eliminate them in the future. The press both domestic and foreign, while praising the overall Slet, were quick to highlight our errors. Mostly the press blamed the president because he often acted contrary to the advice given him by the Slet office staff.

In a staff meeting, Br. Kavalír offered to include members of the Federation of Civil Alert to help solve some of the instructional problems that occurred in the Slet. Before a general meeting of the ČOS committee could be held, the board of instructors met and elected a commission with brothers Štrunc, Vaněk and Pechlát as members. They were charged with the task of preparing a set of principles for future activities, which would relieve the instructors from the bulk of administrative duties so they could devote their effort to their instructional responsibilities. This effort was intended to counteract the many additional duties imposed on instructors by Klinger and Bukovský. Moreover, a group of specialists was formed to review, revise and update Sokol terminology.

At the ČOS meeting, which followed the commission's actions, no effort was made to coordinate any activi-

ties with the Federation of Civil Alert. The alert organization quickly lost favor thereafter and soon disbanded.

## THE SEPTEMBER MOBILIZATION

Hitler's aggressive actions continued to increase in intensity so that by September 12, 1938, he created a serious situation concerning the Sudeten German students, then operating under the leadership of Henlein. France and England tried to soften Hitler's outrageous demands of returning all-German lands held in Czechoslovakia to the Reich. When they were unsuccessful, they sent a joint letter to Czechoslovakia recommending we accept Hitler's demands. On September 23rd, President Beneš announced a general mobilization to take effect the following morning, but at 8 a.m. the following morning, the mobilization was cancelled.

On September 23rd, I was lecturing in Čelákovice, which is located approximately 12 miles from Prague. My subject was the military education of Sokol women. There I met Sister Lida Tumová, an instructor. How small the world is! We had been friends since the first world war when she was an instructor in the town of Kostelec na Labem, and I always had time for her. After the lecture, we tried to sit down for dinner, but we were interrupted by the Sokol caretaker's son who informed us that the president would soon be speaking on the radio. Because the speech had not been previously announced, we knew it had to be an extraordinary event. I can still hear those words when the president announced a general mobilization.

We all breathed a sigh of relief at the news because we all wanted and longed to take positive action against the German demands. We knew that Hitler would not back down from his aggressive demands and felt that war was the only solution to the problem. We also knew that mobilization would be an end to the awful tension now being experienced by all true countrymen. Following the speech and the playing of our national anthems, the sister next to me breathed a sigh of relief and stated she had to leave because her husband was one of those who had to report for duty. In this same moment, I remembered that my son-in-law would also have to report and that my pregnant daughter would need my support. I asked Tachar's junior-aged sons for my coat and handbag. I stated I had to go to the railroad station to return home, but the boys objected to my leaving because the streets were jammed with soldiers and their families

reporting for duty and they were afraid that I would not be able to make my way through the mob. They opened the door, and we could see a stream of people filling the entire street and all heading in one direction. I noted that all the new recruits carried small suitcases and I remember wondering how they could have packed so fast. I later learned they anticipated the call-up and were packed in preparation for the message. Then I asked the boys to get a taxi for me. They returned shortly with a taxi, but with the message that the taxi could only take me to the closest train station because the driver also had to report for duty. On the way to the station, we collected recruits headed in the same direction so that by the time we arrived, the taxi was completely loaded both inside and outside. The men were standing on the footboards, sitting on the hood and roof, and hanging on the back bumpers.

I found my son-in-law still at home because he and my daughter knew I would be returning as soon as possible, and they waited for me. We then rode through empty streets to the station, but in Wenceslaus Square we met several families. It was now around 11 p.m. and all who were to be called were already on their way. My daughter was very brave and spoke very quietly until the train with her husband disappeared into a tunnel and then she collapsed and started to cry. Even though I tried to comfort her, she resisted my attempts and said, "You know, none of them will return." That attitude seemed to be reflected everywhere. We saw many women crying during our trip home. It reminded me of women of the classics who, when sending their sons and husbands to war, instructed them to come home carrying or wearing their shields.

After a few days, the recruits returned home because they had been withdrawn, following the categorical demand of England and France, who had cancelled their mutual defense treaty with Czechoslovakia. Many Sokol brothers came to my study in Tyrš House, with their faces downcast. Why are they keeping us from fighting, they asked? These brothers wandered around Prague in groups. They could not stay at home, nor could they work. They were willing to go with anyone who would give them a weapon. This was, perhaps, one of the most serious physical traumas affecting our nation. There is no bigger injury than an injury to the enthusiasm and resolve that was shown on September 23, 1938. This remembrance of crying men now caused me to renew my efforts in preparing for the XI Slet (which was finally held

in 1948) for I could not fail the love and sacrifices by so many who had made our movement possible. In the past ten years, our nation had suffered two major traumas and no nation can endure such emotional impact without showing some defect. In this atmosphere of bitter disappointment and misery, the ČOS instructional staff realized the one safe way of maintaining a proper perspective was to lose oneself in their work. On September 29, President Beneš called on the nation to support one of the heroes of the Siberian campaign in WWI and called on General Syrový to form a new government.

### MUNICH AND ITS AFTEREFFECTS

France now mobilized its Air Force and England its Navy, but their efforts were in vain. Hitler continued with his demands for Czechoslovak territory, but did agree to meet with representatives of England, France, Germany, and Italy to discuss the situation. In Munich, the group met to discuss the Czech problem, but representatives from Czechoslovakia were not allowed to attend the conference. This infamous Munich Conference was about us, but our fate was decided without us.

The consequences of the conference are well-known. To Hitler and Germany, it allocated all Czech territory where most of the inhabitants were of German nationality. The territory in question was divided into five zones, which had to be turned over to Germany within a brief period. To the German demands, Poland and Hungary also added their requests for some border adjustments, which would strip Czechoslovakia of their natural defensive barriers. England and France stated that they would study the new requests and cautioned Czechoslovakia that any aggressive action by them would be considered as an attack against England and France. These events weighed heavily upon the mental and moral makeup of the people and was a true test of national self-confidence and belief in the future of our nation.

The nation now united to help those who were forced to flee their homes and farms. The people were required to leave all their worldly possessions and move to an area outside of the lands turned over to Hitler. Sokol once again led the movement to relocate and feed these refugees until they could re-establish themselves elsewhere. The Sokol women had originally scheduled an instructors' clinic for the Monday following the turnover of land to the Germans, but after hearing a radio appeal to help

the refugees, we quickly changed our plans to be available for the refugee cause. One sister, who had not heard the radio message, came to the school. Because she was one of the people forced to leave her property, she quickly joined the relief effort. Her situation was one of a multitude of families who were affected by the decree.

In general, the way the Sokol women initially addressed the influx of needy people was to divide them and send them to instructor's homes. But when too many refugees arrived, we used the entire Sokol membership for housing. In Prague, there was not a Sokol family who did not have guests, at least on a temporary basis. A central Sokol committee was formed to maintain a watch at the local railroad station so incoming refugees could be met, fed, and re-directed to shelters. I remained a member of this central committee, which was presided over by Helena Černá. I worked closely with Alice Masaryková (daughter of President Masaryk) and Milada Horáková. The committee occupied itself with long-term solutions and assistance, while the task of the various Sokol units was to provide help on an immediate basis. I had been entrusted to implement the ideas of Alice Masaryková, which had been influenced by the famous book written by Božena Nemcova, entitled *The Grandmother*. In the book, the grandmother's pantry always contained plenty for all visitors and potential guests.

Alice proposed that we should establish such pantries in all Sokol buildings and undertake a nation-wide drive to collect food, clothes, shoes, and other household necessities and distribute these items to the needy as they arrived at the collection stations. Later, I was called by the Ministry of National Defense to assist in establishing a program to educate women in preparation for their pre-military training. I was also assigned the task of preparing a series of work camps for alleviating the consequences of unemployment and the low morale being experienced by the displaced.

The results of our heavy work helped us counteract the problems brought about as the result of the Munich agreement. President Beneš resigned and departed for foreign lands, and the nation elected Dr. Emil Hácha as president. Soon thereafter the board of ČOS asked for an audience with the new president with purpose of pledging full support of Sokol to Hácha and his government. I was deeply moved by his apparent confusion, but also impressed by Hácha's acceptance of the office at such a

crucial and highly dangerous time.

Step by step it gradually became known how deeply the Munich agreement affected the nation. With the shift of frontiers, we lost all our border fortification defenses, which in some instances, were better than the Maginot Line in France. We also suffered severe damage of our communication system remaining in the two-thirds of our country, which existed after Germany, Poland and Hungary took their bites out of our country. Also, our national economy was now so limited that any defense of the remaining territory was impossible.

The Communist party now used this tragic situation to launch an effective propaganda program. It reported that England and France had betrayed us and that only the Soviet Socialist Union remained loyal to us and was willing to help. They further reported that this help was impossible because Poland and Romania refused to allow Russian overflights over their territory. It all sounded very impressive and faithful, but years later we learned that the Soviet Union had never asked to have such overflight permission. Finally, to a defenseless nation, abandoned by its friends, only one nation-wide organization was available and strong enough, with the will to survive and help, and that was Sokol.

The shifting of the frontiers and diminishing the Republic deeply affected the Sokol organization. In decreased territory, Sokol lost two whole districts, 548 units, and 137 Sokol buildings. The loss in real estate alone amounted to 62,657,000 crowns. The losses were even greater because many particularly good workers were displaced, and their strength and abilities could no longer be utilized. Because some districts lost units, real estate, and personnel, they were disorganized and could no longer function as a physical or economic entity. The board of men's instructors now stepped in and began the arduous task of re-defining the organizational and territorial boundaries of the remaining districts.

## THE AUTUMN MEETING OF THE ČOS STAFF

A direct result of the Munich conference was the loss of self-confidence, both within the Sokol organization and throughout the nation. Some individuals accepted the political situation and even supported the objectives of the dictatorship now rolling throughout Europe. Democracy seemed to be on a down-trend and people began turning toward other measures for satisfaction of mind and spirit. One new voluntary associ-

ation that emerged from the turmoil was a non-political, non-religious and non-educational entity called the “Federation of Civil Alert” This organization was willing to take matters into their own hands and propose solutions. Some Sokols joined the association and without authority from our duly elected organization pretended to represent and commit Sokol to association objectives. The leader of this rebel group was Miroslav Kavalír, who was then functioning as a speaker for gymnastics training in one of the two remaining political parties.

At a time when Sokol and the entire nation needed leadership of the highest order, ČOS itself overly committed to our social help program and the re-establishment of communications between our fragmented units. They called a meeting with our education committee the last weekend before Christmas. The tasks facing our education committee were twofold; first we had to evaluate and determine where Sokol now stood and second, determine what we should propose regarding the direction that Sokol should take. The solutions to these problems were so large that with the men’s board of instructors in the lead, the meetings were continued until the 10th and 11th of December.

An evaluation of our recent Slet was already in process as detailed questionnaires were sent to all districts and units seeking answers to some general areas of interest. First, we wanted the participants to tell us about their experiences during the Slet period along with their evaluation of the leaders and other incidental information. The “leaders” category was intended to include instructors, education staff, and administration of the Slet. Under other incidental information, we wanted comments on district, unit, and specific drill activities.

The comments we received concerning the district instructors, both men and women, were severe in their criticism, but honest in their evaluation. The responses were firm evidence of the knowledge of the writers and

their acceptance of responsibility for the future of Sokol and the Sokol movement. For example, men did not hesitate to praise the dance numbers performed by the women and the women were the first to acknowledge the success of the small boys’ number. The writers were quick to note our error in limiting the number of small girls that were allowed to participate. There were many rebukes directed against the instructor’s work, the overall leadership of the Board of Instructors, and even against the Slet office. We had to work hard on solutions to the problems and conduct personal coordination with the districts as we resolved each problem. In resolving these problems, we had to consider our new members, our members that were not participating in physical training, and members of existing boards of instructors. We had to completely review the education program from small boys through junior and senior levels and we had to review the method by which we selected and trained our liaison agents who coordinate the activities of the districts.

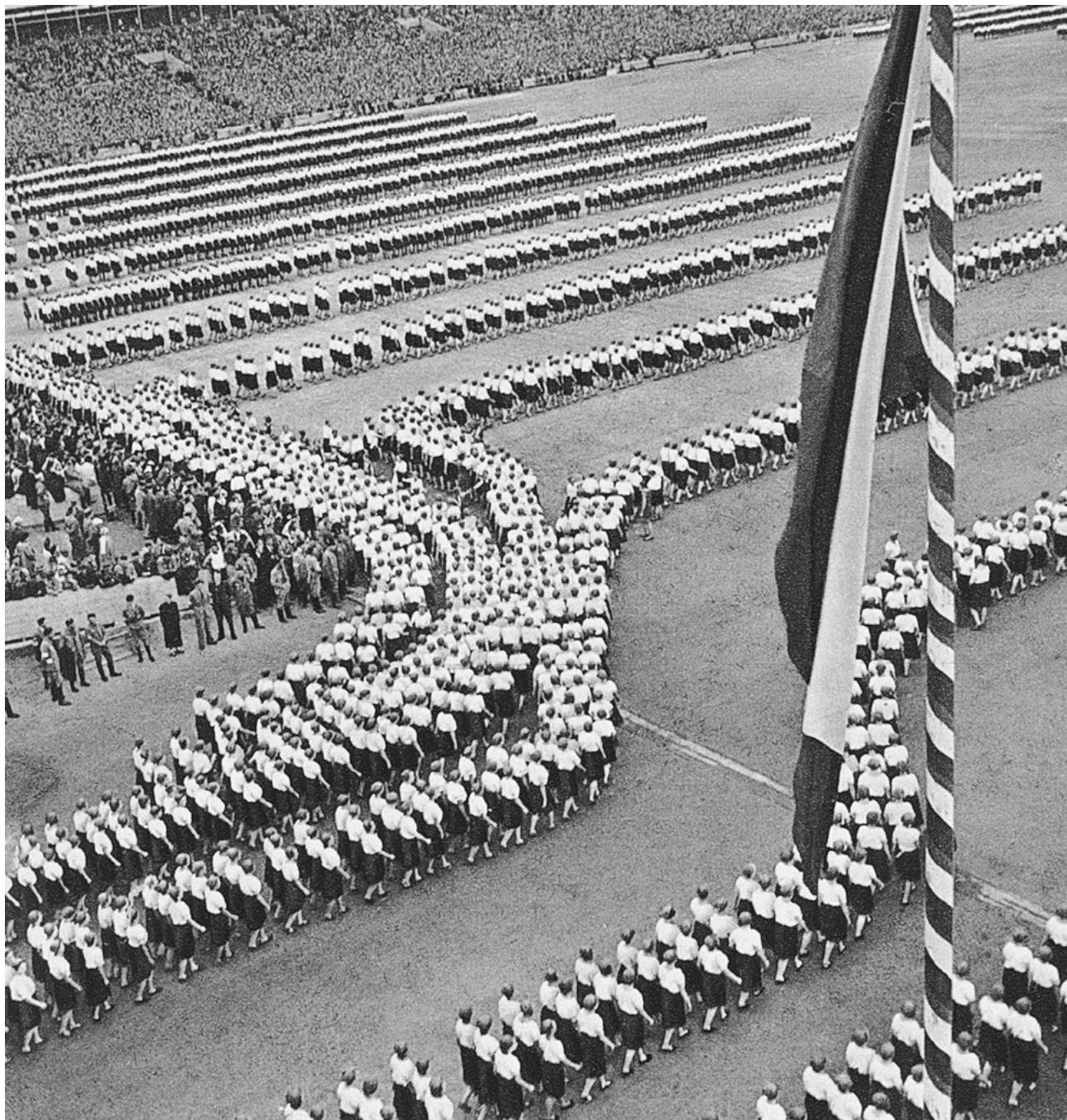
The ČOS general committee ratified the proposals submitted by the instructors and educational staffs. They also, in accordance with basic Sokol ideals and organizational concepts, reinforced their opposition to the Federation

of “Civil Alert.” The committee expressed opposition to the “Alert’s” proposal for uniforms and their dictatorial ideas, and they once again reiterated Tyrš’ concept that Sokol members should all follow his program which stated, “Our task, direction and aim should be that what people have not achieved cannot be achieved.”

In the meantime, within the Federation of Civil Alert, politicians and club-members presented their personal views regarding socialist objectives. To combat these views, ČOS instructors, committees and individual members presented what Tyrš called the brotherhood of action. Sokol clearly and uncompromisingly stated their wholehearted support for liberty and democracy.



**Marie Provazníková and her  
first two granddaughters**  
Photo in Czechoslovakia during  
World War II (circa 1941)



1938 X Slet; women's procession onto the Slet field.



## THE PROTECTORATE

### MARCH 15, 1939

On March 15, 1939, in the middle of the night, the telephone awakened me. It was the ČOS secretary Br. Pelican who excitedly told me that he had learned that the German army would cross our new borders and that the Czech army would not offer any resistance. He told me to come to Tyrš House as soon as possible as there were documents to burn, which could, if found, endanger my safety as well as other leaders of ČOS.

Soon the board, employees, and others assembled at Tyrš House. Very quickly the furnace began burning at full force as we destroyed many documents and then sat back to await the arrival of Hitler's troops. It came with the suddenness of a lightning bolt which precluded any possibility of defensive action. Later that day, an official notice was posted which stated that Bohemia and Moravia were now "Protectorates" of the German Empire. We now understood the ramifications of President Hácha's summons to Berlin and the course of the negotiations that had taken place. We had heard rumors that a deal had been made and the so-called whisper campaign had been correct. These rumors were the first phase of an extended period of whisper communications which would be the way we received our information.

In the three months since the last meeting of ČOS, the nation had received many shocks, but the invasion was by far the most difficult to accept. When we had lost our borders and then some of our units, we thought it was the most severe problem that could occur. Now our task was saving our nation, so that we would have a future.

On the evening of our regular board meeting, ČOS President Bukovský informed us that a Sokol brother journeyed that morning to the Castle to greet the uniformed General Gajda, who was to declare himself the

leader of the nation, and president of the newly formed fascist republic. After waiting for several hours at the Castle, the German occupants forced him to leave the area. German soldiers now fully occupied Prague. The board was stunned by the news, which was accepted without discussion or debate. Some members wondered what the future of Sokol would be. Without the consent of the board, the ČOS President Bukovský had taken it on himself to pay a visit to the head of a fascist state. By his actions, he disclosed his political leanings, but unfortunately, there was no time for explanations.

A few days after our ČOS meeting, Konstantin Von Neurath was proclaimed the first Empire Protector of Bohemia and Moravia. On the day before the occupation, the chairman of the Slovak Autonomy Government movement, Joseph Tiso, following an agreement with Hitler, declared Slovakia an independent state and requested the state be given the protection of the German Empire. We well remembered our Slovak friends and the large crowds which, three years ago, that so warmly welcomed their Bohemian brothers and sisters.

I remembered František Klimeš, perhaps the first real Czechoslovak, a publisher who moved to Slovakia before the first world war. He told me a story of how one day his son had returned home from school saying, "I am not a Slovak, I am a Czech." Klimeš had lived with Slovaks so long and was so well liked that they had made him mayor of the city of Liptovský Svatý Mikuláš. After the declaration of Slovakia as a separate state, the Slovaks talked to him about requesting Slovak citizenship so he could stay in Slovakia, but he answered, "I am a Czechoslovak, and I am as much at home here as in Bohemia." He did not vary from his ideals and remained in Slovakia.

Other Czechs located in Slovakia were forced to leave their homes and jobs which increased the unemployment rolls in Bohemia. Tiso's twenty years of subversive activities were successful only with Hitler's help and the treachery of the clerical political party, but not by the will of the Slovak people. The memories of this treachery are still so painful and difficult for me to write about it. There are no words which can grasp the feeling of how it is like for a free person to go to bed at night and arise the next morning as a slave. We heard numerous stories of suicides and how many of our young men, at significant risk to their lives, crossed the border into Poland seeking freedom.

In Bohemia and Moravia there now existed a church-yard type atmosphere. The Bohemian radio called on prominent citizens to address the nation with messages of self-esteem and a will to live. I heard one such message full of laments. This was not what we needed; we needed someone to say to the faint-hearted that the loss of our independence is not the end of everything, but that the nation still exists, and it needs to be urged into striving for a new life.

Because Hitler and the Nazi movement only saw women as an implement to be used to preserve the race, as the special laws imposed by him on citizens affected women more than men. The new laws diminished the possibility of women being employed in public services, so some families even considered it unnecessary for their daughters to pursue higher education. When I was asked to make a speech, I selected "the meaning of education on future generations" as my subject. Unfortunately, the broadcast of the speech coincided with major events, such as Hitler's entry into a captured capital, so it was subjected to unusual scrutiny. Also, at that time there was a festive march into Wenceslaus Square consisting of the occupying troops and a parade of the highest representatives of the victorious nation. In the broadcasting building, the editor accepted me with some embarrassment. She disclosed that my script had not been prohibited nor had it been approved. The script remained on the desk of the German censor and was still open. Apparently, the censor, in his haste to view the parade, had forgotten to finish the work.

Whenever our nation won, it was always by our superior wit rather than our physical strength. I decided to take a risk, so I crossed out the nearest sentence, which

was unimportant and took the script into the broadcast booth. After the end of the broadcast and while the Czech employees were still in a state of high tension, I encountered the censor who apparently had forgotten me. The only consequence to the episode was that for some time thereafter it was said that we have two champions, Franta Kocourek and Sister Provazníková. Kocourek was a broadcast reporter, who, at times, permitted himself to say more than was authorized. He paid for his folly with his life as he never returned from a concentration camp.

Slovakia was not represented in the ČOS 1939 Spring meeting. I also remember it was the first time since my election that I did not have gentians (a type of herb) on my table. Gentians had always been at my table for each spring meeting since my election on as Director of Women. After being picked up by František Klimeš on the day before the meeting from a place called Demänovská Dolina, in northern Slovakia. A moment after this, the postman delivered a small box from which we extracted several gentians. This piece of blue sky was our proof of Slovak loyalty to the Sokol movement. A year after that we were at war, I received a postcard which read "gentians are blooming, but I cannot send them." In 1945 and for years thereafter fresh gentians once again made their way to my table. In 1949 when I was in New York preparing Americans for their next Slet, someone brought me a letter from home which contained a dry gentian. After the war, I learned that Brother Klimeš suffered a "hell on earth" in World War II, and later under the communists.

When Bohemia and Moravia became a Protectorate of the German Empire, we were forced to accept their laws and orders. In the last days of August 1939, several hostages were taken by the Germans and included several Sokols. The Sokols were not taken because they were Sokols, but because of their political activities. Among these Sokols was Miroslav Klinger, who, despite a warning by the ČOS board, presented himself as a candidate and was elected as a member of the agency of the city of Prague. All those arrested were sent to a concentration camp at Dachau.

The reason for the hostage taking became clear on September 1, 1939, when Germany attacked Poland. The Germans wanted to be sure of their security in the rear areas while they concentrated on the military front. The German attack came despite the allied treaty Poland had with England and France. Hitler had also concluded a

non-aggression pact with Russia and after the German attack from the east, invited Russia to attack Poland from the west. In the face of such overwhelming odds, Poland was quickly forced to surrender. Hitler's ingenious and well-conceived plan to occupy Czechoslovakia first before they invaded Poland eliminated the possibility that Poland and Czechoslovakia could provide a common defense against aggression.

In the year that followed, Denmark, Norway, The Netherlands, and France also fell to Germany and these countries suffered the humiliation of being occupied. However, the occupants of these nations fought back by forming underground resistance movements which increased in size as time passed.

## UNDER NEW LEADERSHIP

**EDITORIAL COMMENT.** The following information regarding Sokol leadership concerns events that occurred between March 16, 1939, when Hitler declared Bohemia and Moravia to be a Protectorate of the German Empire until October 8, 1941, when Sokol was banned. As noted in the discussions of the Sokol leadership, every effort was made to preserve Sokol. Emil Hácha was Czechoslovakia's president from 1938 until 1939 when the Protectorate was declared. He continued as a nominal president until the end of the war in 1945 but had no power. Thus, he was not able to help the Sokols and not surprisingly even when Sokol was not yet banned, many leaders of the organization were killed or sent to concentration camps.

In the 1939 spring meeting of the ČOS board, we once again faced election of our board and staff members. Even as early as 1937, some of the most respected members of the board had voiced their dissatisfaction with ČOS President Bukovský because of his frequent deviation from the democratic Sokol traditions. Then, in 1939 after a long debate, Bukovský was re-elected by a majority of one vote. A review of the X Slet had disclosed many serious shortcomings of Director of Men Klinger. This lack of leadership was seriously criticized by many. This criticism was only partly remedied when Augustin Pechlát was sent to the director's bridge as Klinger's advisor, during the 1938 Slet.

In the same spring meeting of the instructor's staff, the district instructors submitted a proposal which would reorganize the staff and modernize procedures. Also submitted for consideration was a proposal to adjust Sokol activities to a more contemporary level. To

evaluate these proposals and submit a recommendation, a commission was formed consisting of Štrunc, Meduna, Vaněk and Pechlát.

During the first scheduled meeting of the instructor's staff in 1938, three of the district instructors came to me with a request for help. They were considering a plan that they might propose in the meeting, that would reveal their mistrust of Klinger's ability as the Director of Men; They would then ask for the election of a new director during the same meeting. They also wanted a younger man to assume the leadership role who had a more contemporary view of what was needed to modernize the Sokol organization. When I asked who they had in mind to fill the role, they could not agree on an individual. I recommended they set aside their action until the regular meeting in the spring of 1939. Although they were not members of the nominating committee, they were fully aware of the urgent need for a well-qualified leader who was steeped in the traditions of the Sokol movement. I advised them to elect an older leader who would not hold the office too long and could train a younger man who would then have a chance to demonstrate his organizational and leadership abilities. The young man had to be progressive but at the same time hold tight to the Sokol roots and be able to recognize and distinguish those ideals and ideas that were from Tyrš' teachings.

I also told them that I knew of some very promising candidates, particularly in Moravia, but if they were to ask me their names, I would not know who to recommend. I also said they should contact likely candidates and have them utilize every opportunity to display their capabilities. We would then know much more about them in two years, and election to a higher post would be easier.

The brothers agreed to my proposal, but then turned to me with the question of who they should vote for now. They did not want just anyone from the older group, as that could jeopardize the introduction of a younger candidate for later placement in the leader's role. I recommended Pechlát, who understood the need for change, and I believed he would only be a one-term leader. The brothers were obviously surprised because that modest brother had obviously not entered their minds as a viable candidate. But when they thought about him, they remembered that for long years he had been the leader of the Prague I unit, had trained many fine instructors and

had written many special articles, as well as a book.

Following the 1939 spring meeting of the Educational Committee, brother Vaněk approached me with the news that he had not yet spoken to Brother Pechlát because he was currently on vacation. Since I had access to a vehicle, I offered to drive him to Podelesí above Sázava where Pechlát was vacationing. When Pechlát, his wife and I arrived there, Vaněk and Pechlát went for a walk into the woods, while I entertained the women and children. When the men returned from their work, Vaněk was beaming and Pechlát was smiling. Within 14 days, Pechlát was unanimously elected president of ČOS. The Sokol brothers suddenly became stimulated with increased activity and quickly formed three new working circles: one for Sokol bibliography, one for a Sokol encyclopedia and one for collection of a Sokol biography.

The new leadership started one of the most beautiful periods of my Sokol experience. With Pechlát, we understood each other better than with any previous leader. Jindra Vaníček was older and overshadowed me, so our relationship was admiration on my part and kindly indulgence for a beginner on his part. As a matter of fact, I was not that much younger than him, considering that when I encountered him, I had already been a mother and was a madam professor, but next to him I seemed like a lassie.

My relationship with Agathon Heller was a little easier than with Vaníček as he was elected president at the same time of my election. Although the offices we held were equal on paper, in actual practice, he was much older with much more Sokol work behind him, so generally I held myself in respectful distance from him. While we sometimes suffered a generation gap in our opinions, we always seemed to agree on what was best for Sokol.

I have already written about my experiences with Klinger, so I will only add that my experiences with Pechlát were like a sunny landscape after a storm.

Josef Truhlář followed Pechlát as Sokol president; 1st Vice President was T.V. Keller, who, until recently, had been the leader of the Smichov I unit; second vice president was Karel Sauer, and the third vice president was Jan Stolz. Both Sauer and Stolz were lawyers, so that meant that the ČOS staff was fully aware of their rights and duties. They led the staff in working to maintain Sokol as a democratic organization, despite the injustices of the Protectorate status. The March 15th meeting

cleared the air in Sokol, as it also disclosed those individuals who were willing to accept strange ideas, which were at that time enjoying some success in other areas of Europe. It also revealed the danger of placing indiscriminating trust and blind obedience into the hands of temporary leaders. From the meeting came actions that corrected mistakes being made at the district and local levels and took positive steps to return Sokol to the ways of Tyrš' doctrine. The establishment of the Protectorate in certain ways cleared the air and removed the pretense of our independence, which had, in reality, ended with the Munich conference.

Some of the first casualties of the Protectorate were Truhlář and the secretary Eugen Köppl. They had tried to move some sanitary material from the Red Cross into some Sokol buildings for use by the units in the event of resistance activities. Both were convicted and sent to a concentration camp. After the war they both resumed Sokol activities. In the Spring meeting of 1940, it was resolved that these individuals would retain their positions and that until they did return, the 1st Vice President Jan Keller, a lawyer, would assume their functions. The German Empire leadership, however, ordered ČOS to conduct a formal election and replace the absent officers. Br. Jan Keller accepted election by acclamation and said that he would only be considered as a representative of President Josef Truhlář. In the same meeting we elected Antonín Hřebík, another lawyer, as third vice president.

The war and our Protectorate status stopped all communications between Sokol units outside our country and with all outside gymnastic organizations. Because Sokol activities in our country would require Sokol to display a German swastika beside our Sokol banner, it was decided by ČOS to suspend all public performances. Henceforth, all Sokol activities focused on the educational aspects of our program. We broadened our educational programs by greatly increasing the subjects taught, particularly to our junior classes. Our objective was to make them more self-reliant. There were classes in economic activities and in the raising of home production of food and medicines. We also began programs which concentrated on self-governing activities, and leadership techniques. The youth accepted these changes with great understanding. The leadership of many people was extremely important in carrying out these new goals. Meanwhile, our various commissions continued

to work on revising and updating Sokol's organization and terminology.

#### ***How to Gain Industrious Workers***

I do not know exactly when the newly elected president of my Schmíchov I unit, Jan V. Keller, came to me for advice and help. Apparently, the city of Prague had informed our unit that the rental rooms, located in the Schmíchov shipyard, were no longer available for habitation. My water experience was limited to canoeing and other festive activities, so I really did not understand Keller's desire to live along the river in a room which occasionally was flooded and access to the area was limited at other times. I asked him why it would not be better to find land in the vicinity and build a wooden hut on it. He informed me that it was almost impossible to find a suitable piece of land in the vicinity. I introduced him to Engineer Svarcer who had responsibilities in the vicinity of Prague and knew every piece of land available. I was sure Svarcer could assist Keller with his problem. After Keller's departure, I thought over the whole conversation. I knew him to be a good President who was diligent in performing his duties for the unit. He was one of the best leaders of our organization. I feel my efforts on his behalf helped us gain a good worker.

#### ***Cessation of Activities (1941-1942)***

The 1941 spring meeting of the women's instructor's staff was called for Easter Sunday, in Nové Město na Moravě, a town in the Bohemian-Moravian Highlands. Before the meeting started, a messenger came to me with a confidential message that stated there would be a central decree stopping all Sokol activities. This announcement was to be made before noon, to allow us time to develop plans which would allow us to maintain some sort of contact. It was anticipated that we would have some planning time until we received the official notice through the district director.

The decree stated that all organized activities within Sokol buildings and on the athletic fields would stop. There were some courageous instructors, both men and women, who maintained contacts with former students and continued their activities under the guise of sport everywhere, in private clubs, riverbanks and in clearings in the woods. After many years we learned how these tiny springs of activities, where once there had been a mighty river, kept the fires of Sokol burning. Brother Stahler

called on Sokol members in Slovakia to hide from the sight of Hlinka's guards, but to maintain Sokol life. He also cautioned all about the danger from overt contact with Br. Křc who, in addition to his responsible work in the Sokol underground, was also holding activities with his athletic team at Smichov's Sokol. Such were the dangers and activities of many Sokols who, in addition to operating in the underground, also helped Sokol families who had departed to Czechoslovak military organizations abroad, or who had been prosecuted for their anti-occupation activities.

The Easter holidays that year were very sad. Only the church bells announcing Easter sounded in our minds, and stirred our belief in ourselves at a time when such belief seemed impossible.

When I arrived home from the meeting, some good news was waiting for me; I now had a new granddaughter. We christened her, in my home, by the name of Magdalena Noemi; the godmother was Olinka Fučíková.

Under the rules of the occupation, we could only enter Tyrš House once to obtain our personal property. I forgot to retrieve a small leather case from my Leica camera, in which I carried a metronome that I used to achieve the proper calisthenics tempo on the gym floor. This oversight later caused the Sokol officials considerable trouble. Apparently, the Gestapo found the case and thought someone had stolen a camera from the central inventory and then discarded the case so they could hide the camera easier without a case. The small metronome had been taken as a souvenir by one of my instructors in school, who was my student at the university. She sent it to me in the US in 1977. All Sokol officials remained in the employment of Tyrš House. When they dared, they brought several copies of our books, to the sisters. If the Germans had learned of this scheme, they would have destroyed these valuable records of Sokol topics. The scheme proved to be particularly valuable because eventually everything the sisters had not been able to save was later sent to a stamping mill.

I now became a newly "baked" pensioner, because the Protectorate Government had been ordered to abide by the German Empire's social laws which provided for mandatory retirement of men in state positions at age 55, and women at age 50. Since I had reached 50, I was now, to my great relief, forced to retire on a pension. Teaching

under the rules of the Protectorate could be dangerous. Even if I would not be forced to teach physical education with a bad back, I would be required to read to my classes some official notices. At first, I had some of my students read the notices to the class, but, as a rule, the student, through emphasis and tone, inserted her own opinion and the class would then react to her. Thereafter, I read the notices to the class myself.

Allowing students to read the notice was dangerous because they could then boast how the notice had been read. If the wrong person overheard the boasting, it would be a problem for all. I resumed reading the notices but always read fast and used a monotone in my voice. The students understood, but they seemed to be unable to withhold their coughs during the time I was reading. Once the director called me for a short conference during a break period, but the conference extended into the start of the next period. Because the students did not want to miss a moment of my lectures, they all assembled at the proper time. When I did not appear, one of the students took charge and gave a command for them to march and sing. Just as I was entering the gym, the class was singing: "to drive the German murderers into hell, where they belong." All the windows were opened, facing the street outside. If a German who understood Czech would have happened by at that moment, I would have been sent to a concentration camp.

In addition to my school problems, the Gestapo had been zealously studying our Sokol magazines and other literature. I had a concern about the military aspect of our writing and training. Therefore, the brothers Keller, Pelikán and Pechlát had strongly recommended that a change of scenery would probably be good for several of us. My daughter and son in-law built a summer home in the Czech-Moravian Highlands and with their two daughters decided to spend as much time there as possible. Meanwhile, I moved to Rendlíček, which is how we named our home located near a pond. Certainly, this period of my life was not restful, but rest was the last thing I needed.

### ***Arresting Sokols***

On one of my trips to Prague, when we were stopped in Veselí, a town east of Prague, the postmaster ran out to me and informed me that he had just heard on the radio that Vladimír Groh and General Bílý were arrested. I

thought, "My God, Groh." He was a professor at Brno University, and we were close friends. When he was an assistant professor at Charles University, he taught for a few years with me. At that time, he had only been married a few years and he proudly showed me photos of his first-born son. The son was now in exile somewhere in Germany. On a bus trip to Rome, Groh had provided us with the fairy tale type accommodations in a Roman Monastery. He showed us the eternal city based on some knowledge from his studies so, our understanding of the city and its highlights is without parallel. After the trip, he left us a poem which one of our fellow travelers sent to me in America on the 50th anniversary of our trip. He remembered me in the poem, as the "second mother," which went partially as follows:

"That second one is our second mother, why she did not die, we will tell you shortly. To her, fate entrusted such a long life, till she sells the tickets and writes the last instructor."

Groh said that in his poem that he was not a scientist nor could he sweep you off your feet as a speaker, but he was a pedagogue and before him his students had no secrets. We met again on the ČOS board when he traveled from Brno. It was there I noted his deep faith and all-encompassing hope in the Sokol movement (as suggested in the poem).

When we arrived in Prague, I hurried from the station first to meet Pechlát in a very excited state, and then to visit Zinda because her husband was Vladimír Groh, and her close friend was Bílý. Pechlát was very calm and for the first time he offered to accompany me to the electric railroad because he obviously wanted to speak to me in private. On the way he explained why I had not been invited to the meetings of the central committee, which was charged to lead all Sokol resistance. After the arrest of Truhlář and Köppl, he and President Keller realized the original Sokol governing body, of which I was a member, was too large for safe operations, so they formed a small group of five members: President Keller, instructor Pechlát, secretary Pelikán, brother Hustak and one other. It might have been Pecháček, who had been the senior commander of Jindra (the Sokol resistance group during World War II). However, it was not Kavalír or even Hřebík. Pecháček had been confirmed as a senior commander and the Sokol commander of the Czech's districts. Ladislav Vanák was the commander of

the Moravian districts, which was a continuation of his prior responsibility. All members of the resistance were obligated to select an alternate and inform him of the proper channel of communications in the event of the principals arrest or death. In the event the group of five would be compromised, the alternate group would automatically take over. In the event the second group would become inoperative, it became my responsibility to form a third group consisting only of women. Limiting the group to women was suggested by the Sokol brothers, who hoped that a female organization would be easier to conceal, because of the Nazi's view that women, as second-rate creatures, were only good for birthing and raising children and caring for the home.

Pechlát charged me with the responsibility of disconnecting myself from all activities that could in any way endanger my life. He also placed on me the burden to outline the occupation and after it was over to reorganize Sokol once again. He then told me that the group had especially chosen me for this task because of my outstanding organizational abilities. He then reiterated his position that, in view of the task for which I had been chosen, to outlive the occupation was my duty to Sokol. To this directive from the resistance group, Pechlát added a personal request, which was that by no means was I to permit the election of Kavalír as president of Sokol. In the end he added that he had been directed to contact me about my directed duty in view of the energetic actions of the gestapo in arresting Groh and Bílý and the pursuing of other Sokol leaders. This was my last conversation with Augustin Pechlát. (**Editorial note.** Augustin Pechlát was executed by the Gestapo because of his involvement in the Sokol underground group).

Following my conversation with Pechlát, I did not meet Pelikán as we had previously agreed. Instead, he sent his secretary with a message that I was to avoid meeting with him and all other Sokol leaders because of the danger involved. Further, under no circumstances, was I to step inside Tyrš' House.

Sokol was officially banned in Bohemia and Moravia on October 8, 1941. Before dawn the next day the Gestapo formed a dragnet around our Sokol officers throughout the Protectorate. In Bohemia, our men were arrested, but in Moravia, in some districts, even women instructors were arrested. Some of leaders sought by the Gestapo were missed because on the night of the drag-

net the Gestapo did not find them at home. Br. Hutař was teaching a class in Brno while his family lived in Ždár. The Gestapo looked for him in both places and when they did not find him, they assumed he was in route or that he had been arrested in another location; they then stopped their search. A similar situation apparently also saved educator Antonín Krejci from arrest, because he lived in Brno rather than Prague and did a lot of travelling. He was also on the ČOS board.

The Sokols sought by the Gestapo followed a listing of officers published by the official Sokol documents. When the Gestapo did not deviate in their search for individuals not included on the list of board members, it became apparent that the instructions issued by the resistance committee were followed and no one who had been arrested had disclosed any information concerning other members. An official document issued by the Protectorate disbanded all Sokol activities and confiscated all Sokol property. After the war ended a relative of mine, who was employed by Prague's City Insurance Company, gave me a document which listed all the property confiscated by the Nazis. The property was valued at approximately one billion American dollars and did not include any Sokol property located outside of Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (ČSR).

On the infamous night of 9 October, the Nazis arrested 900 Sokols, which included 49 ČOS board members, 17 members of the central board of instructors, nine members of the educational staff and 216 active district members. The district members included 30 unit presidents, 33 vice presidents and 23 secretaries. The arrested Sokols were first sent to a prison camp in Terezín (near Prague) or Špilberk (in Brno), and later they were transferred to a concentration camp in Osvětim, Poland. In February of 1942, word began leaking to families concerning the deaths of some of these Sokols. Among the first names we received, was to me the most valuable friends of all, the Sokol brothers Jan Pelikán and Štrunc.

Jan Pelikán had been the ČOS secretary, whose every action was to help all those who needed help, and to tie together all the loose ends of a very large and complex organization. He had been an extraordinary journalist who had the knack of knowing the happenings, even in the smallest units, and being able to write about these events without losing sight of the larger picture. On the day when news was received of Scheiner's death, it was

Pelikán who wrote the sad dispatch that was read over the radio by ČOS president Bukovský. Pelikán also planned the time for mourning and secured ČOS board authority to execute his plan. A short time before his arrest, Pelikán confided in me that he had received an offer of safe transport, for both he and his wife to London, but he felt he could not abandon his country or Sokol. He never forgot his membership in the five-member board of the Sokol underground that fought the Nazi's during World War II. Br. Weigner considered Pelikán the most capable personality in Sokol at that time.

Štrunc was the president of the Pilsen district of ČOS and the author of the famous men's calisthenic number which was performed at the 1932 Slet. He was also a member of the commission formed to prevent the penetration by fascists into Sokol membership. It was later confirmed that neither Groh nor Pechlát had succumbed to the Nazi torture and did not betray their fellow Sokols. They had been put to death simply because they were Sokols.

The list of the executed Sokols continued growing until it seemed endless. I realized that the Protectorate President Hácha did not appear to be informed of the situation in the concentration camps, but I did not dare to ask for a personal meeting for I would have been forced to state my reasons for the request. I, therefore, turned to Hácha's secretaries with an appeal for them to help by presenting the Sokol cause for Hácha's help. I judged that there was no proof of the Sokol underground activities for any of the Sokols arrested on October 9, 1941, because they were never brought to trial in an open court. I do not know if my intervention helped, but I do know that Sokols who were still alive in the Spring of 1942 were released. There were so few survivors and, like Br. Bobrovský, they were all in a very weakened state, unable even to make their own way back to their homes.

The women's board of instructors, which fortunately, had not been affected by the arrest order, now sent instructions to the district instructors to provide for the returnees. In addition, the district women were to meet the needs of the survivor families and if more help was needed, they were to turn to members of the ČOS board. Subsequently, we organized a drive for contributions from all the friends of Sokol for the purpose of caring for the war survivors and their families. Coordinator of the drive was Dr. Lev Krča. As the years went by, the need

for funds became greater because of the increase in the number of people arrested and executed, and family savings became depleted. Fortunately, contributions grew in proportion to the need for a spontaneous outpouring of help for the survivors. One example of this generosity occurred when I attended a concert in Representative Hall, where I saw one of the country's foremost skiers. He pretended he did not know me, but then, at intermission time, he casually shook hands with me and covertly left in my hand a bank note for 10 thousand crowns. The critical times meant that no entry of the donation made nor was a receipt given.

I vividly remember František Voženílek, a donor who was a miller. He sent a message to me asking me to send him the address of some family who had lost their main supporter. I was to give this information to his secretary with no other information added. There were many addresses of needy families and to each of them, until the end of the war, a parcel was delivered. I learned that he sent many such parcels, not only the miller, but also to his employees. Unfortunately, his mill, over the protest of his employees, was one of the first to be nationalized and Voženílek saved himself by going into exile. The willingness to help one's fellow man was the only light that sustained us during those dark times. Those who could help did so without being asked.

A physical education colleague of mine contacted me with a story about a boy student whose father was missing and who was fading away before my colleague's eyes. He found the boy's physical deterioration was because he and his family were starving. By sheer coincidence, on that same day an unknown lady introduced herself as Sokol member Lida Hušková, and offered to help. She was from a poor family and earned her living as a dressmaker. At the beginning of the war, she purchased a cheap, large quantity of watertight material which no one else wanted. She proceeded to make and sell rain-coats from the material and, thereby, made quite a bit of money. From those individuals who could not afford to pay, she accepted food in exchange for the coats. She told me she had more money than she could spend and wanted the address of a family in need with whom she could share her wealth. I quickly gave her the address of the starving family and she assured me that she would take care of them.

I saw Lida once again in the spring of 1945 when we

happened to be on the same streetcar. She asked me to send some Sokol sisters to her and to make sure they brought shopping bags with them, because she was going to make them Santas. She said that she had a warehouse next door to an Empire German who came to her with a key to his warehouse and asked her to take custody of the key as he was returning home to Germany. This occurred in April of 1945, when cautious Germans were fleeing back to their own country. She had just returned from an examination of the warehouse in which she found clothes, shoes and rare foods that had obviously been confiscated. Because she did not want to spoil the opportunity to distribute the items to the needy, she asked the sisters to act as her agents. We did not often have such good fortune, but when such times occurred, they strengthened our belief in mankind.

### **Without ČOS**

When ČOS was officially abolished in 1941, it was not the first time that Sokol had been disbanded. Austria also abolished ČOS in WWI, but not the districts or units. Apparently, the Nazis had learned a lesson from that experience, for they not only abolished ČOS, but also all districts and units. Until World War II, we knew very little about life in and the horror of concentration camps. Hardly anyone returned from a camp except those who were immediately released upon entry into Terezin (the concentration camp near Prague). Letters that were received from Terezin contained very little information about camp conditions, so some wives of inmates went to the area hoping to catch a glimpse of their husbands on their way to their work detail. We surmised that life in the camp was very difficult, but from our position outside, we could not visualize the reality of the camp's conditions. When the news came that the Sokols had been transferred to Osvětim (a concentration camp in Poland), we could only anticipate the worst.

A story circulated throughout the Sokol community that Osvětim was connected by a series of underground tunnels to some mines in the camp's vicinity that could possibly be used for smuggling material to inmates. I took a trip to Ostrava to inquire if there was any truth to the story, but Ostrava's Sokols did not believe any existed. I had taken some money with me which I left with the Sokols so it could be used to purchase needed items if

a way could be found to help the Sokol inmates. I told them if they were successful, they should let me know and I would find more money for them. The tunnel story was never confirmed.

On my return trip, I stopped in Kroměříž (in Eastern Moravia) where a former student and friend lived and taught Sokol women. She had just received news of the death of someone close to her. She pleaded with me to meet with some loyal sisters to encourage them in their future activities. We were supposed to meet in a church. When we arrived at the church for our meeting, my breath was driven from my lungs, for instead of a few women, the church was full of men and women. The Protectorate's law noted that each large assembly had to be officially approved well in advance of the event. I told myself it was already too late to do anything about the gathering, as the crime was done, so I took advantage of the situation and made a speech. I figured if I was going to be punished, I might as well be punished for something rather than for nothing. Nothing ever came out of the incident, so apparently, it was not discovered by the German occupiers.

Soon after the mass arrest of Sokols, I drove to Brno, where I visited a young sister who had recently become a widow. She surprised me by inviting Br. Kavalír to visit during my stay. He had recently been released from prison because he was in the last stages of cancer. I was horrified when I saw his colorless face and the look of death in his eyes, but Kavalír was smiling. He stopped at the foot of the staircase to take a breath and without even a greeting, launched into a Sokol comment. He said, "What is the use, Sister. We men showed the world that we cannot manage. You women will have to take things into your hands." He belonged to that group of spiritual leaders who were conscious of their responsibilities, and dedicated democratic Sokols who evolved from the autumn ČOS meeting in 1938. Brno had been the main hot box of resistance against totalitarian elements which attempted to infiltrate Sokol during the preceding years. I understood this problem well, for we had the same bad experience in Prague at Sokol's central headquarters with President Bubrovský.

In Brno there seemed to be a manifestation of Očenášek's theory that often in a time of crisis, the oppressed minority can sometimes take advantage of the ruling majority. The minority participants will realize that they

can obtain leaders that are more distinguished than the representatives of the majority group, and therefore obtain better results. In Brno there developed a group of outstanding theorists, such as Ladislav Jandásek (professor and editor), then later Vladimír Groh and Jan Uher. They also had realists such as instructor Žežula (warmly called Ceci) where, under his leadership and guidance, he developed gymnastic competitors who ranked among the best. Frequently, these outstanding leaders and gymnasts moved to Prague where they could concentrate on activities that would present better opportunities for advancement in the Sokol ranks.

For some time, we at ČOS in Prague had considered the possibility of transferring more authority for a leadership role to the instructors located in Brno. Events leading up to 1938 demonstrated that Tyrš House was not large enough for the complex activities and the educational program that was required. We considered opening a second center called Fügner House in Brno and then a third center somewhere in Slovakia. This concept would certainly expand the opportunities for greater contributions by a broader base of instructors and would result in a better exchange of viewpoints and a higher level of morale throughout the organization. All these thoughts passed through my mind as I spoke to Br. Kavalír. He told me of his experiences in the concentration camp and how things became easier for him after his arrest when he was able to communicate with other Sokol inmates. The inmates spoke of past experiences and because of their great hunger, often spoke of fancy food. None of these men knew what awaited them.

### ***Assassination of Reinhard Heydrich***

In September 1941, the protector of Bohemia and Moravia, a decent man, Konstantin Von Neurath, was replaced by Reinhard Heydrich, who immediately declared martial law. He then proceeded to execute many prominent Czech personalities including Groh and Pechlát. On 9 October 1941, the crack-down on Sokol began with the arrest of 900 Sokols, mostly because they were Sokol members. Then on 9 December, 1941, a group of Czech paratroopers from England landed in the Bohemian and Moravian Protectorate with the goal of eliminating Heydrich. The mission was executed on 27 May 1942 by two men, one of whom was a Sokol member. Germany responded with a blood bath which included

many Sokol members of the underground resistance movement, who had helped the paratroopers.

**EDITORIAL COMMENT.** Provazníková refers to Konstantin von Neurath as a “decent man,” probably because of the contrast between him and his ruthless successor, Reinhard Heydrich. The crackdown on Sokols occurred one month after Heydrich’s arrival. Hitler removed von Neurath because he was “too lenient.” One of Heydrich’s goals was the elimination of Jews.

The paratroopers landed near the small village of Nehvizdy, east of Prague, and then contacted members of the Sokol resistance. The first food they received after landing was from a Sokol officer, František Kroutil, and the Sokol underground provided safety for the paratroopers. Kroutil later emigrated to the US. Many people have wondered if the death of Heydrich was worth the price we had to pay. However, there was never a doubt that assistance would be rendered once the paratroopers arrived and Sokol resistance took them under their wing for protection. During the long period of preparation for the attempt on Heydrich’s life, many people became involved in harboring the paratroopers. It is impossible to keep secret the residence of alien people for a long period of time. Even the children, who willingly accepted tasks in support of the effort, were placed in jeopardy. In the end, a 14-year-old, daughter of a Libeň’s railway man, dragged off the mark used by the group in their assassination attempt, and her brother, who destroyed it, suffered. Many entire families, including the children, were executed. Even a doctor who gave first aid to a paratrooper was executed.

**EDITORIAL COMMENT.** On 9-10 June, 1942, German SS men assailed the village of Lidice (near Kladno, about 20 miles northwest of Prague). They shot and killed 173 men and boys (14 years and older). Children were either adopted by German families or sent to orphanages. Women were sent to concentration camps. The assault was the pretense of a reprisal for the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich, even though involvement of the Lidice people was never proven. The Nazi’s goal was to make Lidice a forgotten spot on the map. However, the rebuilt village is a remembrance of the evils of the Nazi atrocities.

I cite the previous examples to illustrate how wide the help extended and how willing people were to become involved. The investigation by the Germans was very thorough. After the incident, photographs of articles

used by the paratroopers were placed on display. Even a suit worn by one of the paratroopers, obtained from one of the helpers, was put on display and a reward of one million crowns was posted for anyone who would identify the owner. The suit belonged to a tenant of Br. Jaroslav Vašata. The suit was displayed in the window of Bata's store on Václavské Náměstí (Wenceslaus Square), which was just a few houses from a restaurant owned by Vašata. Many people had seen Vašata in the suit many times, but no informer came forth to claim the reward. Such was the companionship and dedication to the common cause of freedom displayed willingly and with complete disregard for the danger involved.

### **Vaněk**

Sometime in 1944, and long after the dissolution of ČOS, I was preparing to depart for Prague, when a messenger from the postmaster of Veselí, a town in Southern Bohemia, delivered a message to me that I should visit him. That was strange, and, therefore, urgent. The Postmaster had a message from my daughter, which stated that I was not to go to Prague for any reason, and that I should see her at Mladá Boleslavá's home. When we met, she told me that two strangers had visited her and were looking for Mrs. Papírníková. After she responded that she knew no such person, they then remembered my name. They stated that they were sure I was with her. Of course, my daughter denied this and said if they did not believe her, they could check with the police. At that time, all visits and visitors had to be reported, even if the stay was only for one night. The men then replied they would be damned if they would go to the police. The comment aroused my daughter's suspicion and caused her to think that here were two instigators whose objective was to provoke a response which would be against the Nazi's law.

The next day the same two men came again but this time not to the apartment, but into my daughter's workplace where they left a sealed envelope, without an address, but with the message it was to be delivered to me. Their entire demeanor only strengthened my daughter's distrust, and she knew that the existing law required her to report the suspicious visit to the police. She also realized she could not eliminate the possibility that the envelope contained a message from the underground despite the unusual method of its delivery.

She had to consider the safety of her two children and to exposing herself to the danger of arrest. In the end, she decided to open the envelope and read the contents. In the envelope, she found a piece of toilet paper with one corner missing. On the paper was a message written in pencil. In the introduction of the message, the writer explained that he had no freedom of movement and, therefore, had no other means of communication. My daughter explained that the message stated, "From the handwriting you will know that the person writing to you was the editor of the Sokol bibliography. A messenger will come to you with the missing portion of the paper. He will state that you should support my request to organize a new underground network to replace the previous one, which is essentially ruined. You can trust the messenger. I beg you to help."

The letter was obviously a real message sent from prison, which made the situation very critical. We could not eliminate the possibility it had been written under duress and the writer was now an exposed member of the underground. My daughter found another envelope like the one which contained the message. She placed the letter in the fresh envelope, sealed it and placed it on her writing table under a stack of unpaid bills and price lists. She then prepared herself for eventual police examination and was willing to admit to the visit but insist that she had not delivered the message and had forgotten about its existence.

I learned from the letter that the writer was Ladislav Vaněk, formerly the president of Vyškov Sokol District and the individual who had sent two supporting instructors to me before the election in 1939. I knew from Pechlát that Vaněk was a trusted leader of the Sokol resistance in Moravia and at the time of the attempt on Heydrich's life he was the leader of the entire underground in Bohemia and Moravia. He became the leader of the underground after the arrest of Pecháček. I did not know or recognize the handwriting so, therefore, the reference to his handwriting sounded like a warning to me. The fact he was turning to me now at this late date seemed to negate his knowledge of my mission as explained to me by Pechlát at our last meeting. Later my daughter told me that in her first report on the content of the letter she had forgotten to tell me about the portion of the letter that discussed a visit that Vaněk and I had in Podělusy (a town just south of Prague). Had I

known this information earlier, I would have been more convinced of the letter's authenticity. This error on my daughter's part possibly saved me.

In Prague, a frightened janitor's wife explained to me how, not too long ago, that two men visited her and demanded to know my address. The men were very self-confident and overbearing. After their repeated threats, she told them that my daughter (Dr. Alena Polesná) should know my address. I had been searching for news about Vaněk and learned he had walked away from the group when they had arrested the bulk of the Sokol leadership. He was arrested later. This news supported my distrust in his letter.

Soon after this a stranger came to me and showed me his citizen's identity card, which was obviously new, whereas the average person's card was worn and dirty from frequent use. He asked me if I knew the name Jindra, which was the name of the Sokol resistance organization. I told him I knew only one Jindra and that was an instructor named Vaněček. I was then asked if I knew Vaněk. I asked which Vaněk, short or tall? The short one was the instructor of Prague's Vyškov district and the tall one was the director of Podbělohorská district. At that he again pushed his card toward me, along with a scrap of paper and asked, "Does this say something to you?" I asked, "what is it supposed to say?" He stated that I had received a letter from my daughter. I replied that I did not receive a letter from my daughter. He wondered why I had not received such a letter and I explained I had not visited my daughter for some time, and she may have forgotten about any such letter. This induced him to tell me the purpose of his visit. In the letter my daughter was supposed to have delivered, the message that Vaněk had requested I organize a new network of Sokol resistance and the bearer of the scrap of paper was to act as my helper.

I now acted very indignant and told him that any such action was illegal and how could he ask me to do something like that. He said he considered me a patriot. I said that I was, but I had to admit that realistically, we were beaten and if we were to survive as a nation, we had to bow to the victor. In all my life I never had to be so completely convincing. The man now left, but threw back at me, "We will meet again after the war." I knew the life and health of my entire family had depended on my performance.

After this incident, I knew I could not avoid the situation any longer, so I called the Czech-State police. It was enough when I told them I had a visitor as they immediately sent two policemen to my quarters. After my brief description of the visit in which I was interrupted only once and that was in reference to "Jindra," to which I once again added the name Vaněček (indicating a person, rather than the underground resistance movement). They declared the man must surely be a gestapo agent. I was now sorry I had not notified the police sooner. When the agent had spoken to me, I had not invited him into my apartment, so the discussion occurred in the hallway. The police only added they had some difficulty finding my apartment as my name tag was missing from the door. I said there was a card on the door, but when we looked, it was gone. We found the card in a recess next to the door where the agent had tossed it. Apparently, he had taken the calling card with an intent to use it in some harmful way, but on the back of the card I had described its intended use, so it was useless to him. The Police officers now gave me a separate telephone number I should use in the event I was contacted again. I was not contacted again, and I heard nothing of Vaněk, until the end of the war at the Prague uprising.

After the war ended, Vaněk came to me and admitted he had broken under torture and asked for my forgiveness. The widow of President Keller came to me with the news that she wanted to denounce Vaněk in people's court because he had testified against her husband during his trial. She wanted me to join her in her indictment against Vaněk, but I refused. I felt I could not judge people who broke under the terrible torture imposed by the Nazi's during their interrogations. I could not know how I would have reacted to the torture, for I could have been broken and possibly given testimony that would harm some of my friends.

I am not certain if I was the only one that Vaněk tried to sacrifice in his quest for self-preservation. I did hear through rumors that there were other Sokols who broke when tortured and named others. I also heard of a woman, I do not remember her name, who was also contacted because of Vaněk's confessions. She was contacted by a gestapo agent, but then failed to notify the police. She died in a concentration camp.

The appointment of Vaněk as chairman of the newly created Department C of the Ministry of Education

under Minister Zdeněk Nejedlý, was a questionable judgement. However, the appointment did not last long, as he was relieved by Miroslav Klinger. I do not know if the change was in connection with the appointment of national socialist Jaroslav Stránský in place of communist Nejedlý.

Many years later, J. F. Berton, from Australia, wrote a letter to me in which he stated he wanted to discuss the dark past of Ladislav Vaněk. He wrote about his connection with Dr. Krajina and other prominent people who resented Vaněk's actions and asked for the addresses of other Sokols who may have served in the underground with him. From his letter, it was apparent Berton did not know very much about Vaněk's background and I was surprised he was trying to carry out an investigation from such a distance. I was able to answer many of his questions, as I felt it was my duty to acquaint everyone about the facts as I knew them.

Berton told me that he had established communications with some people in Czechoslovakia who had testified in Vaněk's trial, and that their testimony did not agree with my facts. I convinced myself that Berton had taken on a task which was beyond his ability or capability. Because of my eye-sight problems and other circumstances, I had been forced to get rid of anything that would detract from my Sokol duties; therefore, I no longer have any of my correspondence concerning this case. I do remember that later in New York, Dr. Srba, who had been a prominent resistance worker, gave a lecture in which he credited Vaněk with many secret underground actions of the highest merit. My hope is that the difference between my personal experiences, and those brought out in testimony at the trial, and those described by Dr. Srba, may someday be resolved by a historian who has the resources to review all the facts starting with the occupation itself.

In 1986, there appeared an article by the Nazi, Hans Panwitze, in a Swiss magazine, concerning information about Vaněk, which had come to light in 1980. After the war's end in 1945, the Sokols resolved his situation and ČOS appointed a special commission to cleanse itself and all districts and units of all unwanted or unpatriotic individuals. I could not follow all their activities because I had so much other work to do, but in the end, and based on the results, I assume the commission shared my views regarding Vaněk.

Certainly, one cannot forget the good that Ladislav Vaněk did for Sokol and for his work with the resistance groups, up to the time of his arrest. However, from that time on we have a different man standing in front of us. Even today we do not know who told the truth. Was it those who testified to the heavy torture endured by Vaněk such as Dr. Kudrnovsky Jr., or Hans Panwitze, the Nazi, who wrote in German military documents that the information was obtained from Vaněk without resorting to torture?

In the Spring of 1942, the Sokols who had been arrested and were able to walk without too much effort, were released from prison. Others, such as Stanislav Bukovský, who were too sick or emaciated, were retained. When Hřebík and Kavalír, who had been discharged from prison, had recovered, I suggested we meet to discuss the reorganization of Sokol and our future.

The last President of ČOS was Jan Keller, a lawyer, who previously was Vice President. The men's director was Augustin Pechat, who the Nazi gestapo executed in 1941. The first and second vice presidents were missing and dead, respectfully. According to a resolution by ČOS in September 1940, Josef Truhlář was still the President, but he was in a concentration camp and his return was doubtful. I believed it important that we consider all possibilities, because only Hřebík, from the original hierarchy, remained in Prague.

Hřebík invited us for a visit. From the conversation, I soon grasped the fact that Kavalír was unwilling to follow the dictates of the last ČOS committee in which they resolved the unification of all training and sports into one educational organization in Czechoslovakia. He was not willing to change his convictions regardless of any arguments I made. Hřebík did not take part in the conversation, and it was obvious that he had no interest in cooperating in any organizational effort. I finally realized that further efforts on my part in attempting to create some restoration activity was useless, so I ceased further attempts to do so. About a year later, I received a telephone call from a former member of the Men's Board of Instructors, who stated that because Kavalír was making no attempt to restore the Sokol organization that he wanted to take over leadership of restoration activity. I firmly rejected his offer and declared that if he tried to act, I would stand against him. He then made no further attempt to seize the leadership position.

## RENDLÍČEK

A summer house, which we called Rendlíček (Small Saucepan), was in the Bohemian-Moravian Highlands by Ždár, and was home during the war years. War is a very emotional time and everyone who owned land would not sell at any price. My son-in-law's brother, a lawyer, won a legal dispute and was able to obtain from his client a piece of land located on a lake which had very little economic value. The property was land-locked, and the soil contained many rocks. Around the Highlands, it was often said that the lake was surrounded by stones and that piece of property confirmed the story.

With a lot of effort, I was able to remove the boulders and by diligently carting peat moss, which I used as fertilizer, I was able to develop a very utilitarian garden. From the moment the first boot of a German soldier set foot on Czech soil, food was in short supply. Having a garden and raising much of your own food was not only a necessity, but it was also a national duty. I received a note from my daughter that starting in May, she would send her children along with a maid to Rendlíček. They would bring with them sufficient ration coupons for their provisions. Milk could be purchased in a nearby village, but the allocation was insufficient, so I purchased a goat.

I learned to milk the goat, but it had a nasty habit of putting his foot into the nearly full bucket, so that bucket of milk was quickly added to the fertilizer for my garden. In time, I learned to cope with the goat, who provided us not only with milk, but each year with three calves. One was given to the church as a traditional Easter offering, the second was given to the miller's wife, who took care of the goat during the winter and the third we used as food. When we killed it in the fall, the farmers traded me precious butter, equal in weight to the tallow they could use for soap, as that commodity had disappeared from the store shelves.

With food growing ever scarcer, but my confidence was growing stronger by the day, so, we soon added rabbits, chickens and finally a pig to our small farm. Since that time, rabbits have never been a part of my menu. When we purchased the pig, it weighed 100 pounds, but its weight increased to 400 pounds by the time we killed it. Initially I knew nothing about raising pigs, but eventually through some wise counsel from a farmer, we were successful. The farmer made fun of me, probably because

he felt somewhat insulted that a lady from Prague would have the know-how to be successful in raising a pig. When he saw he could not dissuade me from my objective, he told me what they taught in agricultural schools and the things he did not do. According to his advice, I should graze the suckling so it would grow in length and thereby be a receptacle of lard. One suggestion was to feed the pig bone powder and other delicacies.

In the evenings, I carried bags of scraps and added them to the feed. On Sundays, when the farmers toured their fields by my fence, I usually received some advice which, generally, started with the question, "Do you still have the little pig?" When I answered in the affirmative, he asked if he could see it. When he saw it, it is a wonder he did not take off his hat as a sign of surprise because he could not believe that a lady professor from Prague could be so successful. The problems started when it came time to kill the pig. There was a law that whenever a pig was killed, a certain percentage of the pig was given to the officials, but it was not passed on to the people. If I followed the requirement, my loss would be far too great, as the pig now weighed 400 lbs. My farmer advisor suggested that I simply state that the pig died for everyone would believe that the lady professor would not know how to raise a pig. Finally, I found a butcher who would sign a document that the pig weighed 190 lbs. at the time of slaughter which also happened to be the weight under which it was unlawful to kill a pig. Naturally, I had to give the butcher a few pounds of meat because under the Protectorate laws it was a penalty of death to deal on the black market. The killing could have caused me a lot of trouble, because people who violated the law ended up in a concentration camp.

Rendlíček stood in a secluded section of the bank of a lake, which led to a bay with a shape that resembled a pan with a handle. Under the wharf near us ran a road and hidden by the wharf was a mill which was, perhaps, 350 meters from my house. The lake was surrounded on one side by a field and on the opposite side by woods. In the woods stood a cabin owned by Dr. Leopold Pospíšil from Olomouc, who was an educator and the editor of the Olomouc Sokol bulletin. While our house could be seen from the road, the Pospíšil's house was completely hidden by the woods.

My remote location did not prevent me from remaining in contact with my fellow Sokols. Brothers and sisters

were constantly arriving from Brno; many of our Sokol sisters came from Prague by train. Our blackout regulations required that I keep the windows that faced the road blacked out. But I was able to keep lighted those windows that faced the lake and the field so the sisters who visited me at night could use the shorter path through the field to find the house.

On the far side of the lake there was a sandy beach where a few families from Prague came to swim. One day a young man swam to my side of the lake and told me that when he heard I lived on the opposite side of the lake, he had to swim over to meet me. He told me his name was Svoboda. How could I not know the name as I knew of three Svobodas, all outstanding athletes. A few weeks later, I heard he had been executed because of a mistake. Apparently, at his job in Brno, there was some fodder for horses missing. This problem was in his area of responsibility and because such a crime was a capital offense, he was blamed and put to death. After the execution, the fodder was found, but of course it was too late.

Among my visitors was a Miroslava Stibrová who had been an instructor in Kolín, a part of the Tyrš district. She was half Jewish with a mother who was a Christianized Jew, but was sent to the Terezin Concentration Camp, near Prague. Miroslava's whole purpose in life was to glorify Sokol, while at the same time, she was one of its most critical members. For her views, she had my utmost respect. After the arrest of her mother, the Gestapo made a thorough search of her home and found a collection of antique handguns in the attic. Included in the find was a modern gun, but for the find to constitute a capital offense, ammunition had to be included. Because the collection had belonged to her grandfather, she did not really know what was included in the contents. Unfortunately, some cartridges were found in a small pill box hidden in some material for doll clothes. The discovery was sufficient for the Gestapo to order her arrest and send her to prison. Among the prisoners, was a gypsy lady who predicted the future by reading palms. She asked Slava to let her read her palm and then predicted that nothing would happen to her. Slava, of course, said it was nonsense because being caught with a gun and cartridges was an offense punishable by hanging. She then got word to me that she wanted me at her trial, so I travelled to Prague and waited with her sister in-law for the trial to end. I knew I would recognize what the verdict

would be, as anyone who was judged guilty would appear with handcuffs for the sentencing. When Slava appeared, she was without handcuffs. In the doorway, when she saw us, she fainted and the guards, who brought her to us, wanted to know what to do when she recovered.

Later, Slava told us that on the night prior to her trial, she had a dream. In her cell by an open window, she saw her grandfather. She had never seen her grandfather or even a photograph of him, yet somehow, she knew it was him. Her grandfather was standing by a table on which were displayed all the guns found by the Gestapo. He picked up each gun, in turn, examined it carefully and returned it to the table. When he came to the small box containing the ammunition, he threw it out the window. He then came to her side and said, "Slava do not worry, nothing is going to happen." Slava said, "Grandfather, you know that is not the truth." The grandfather once again told her not to worry as nothing was going to happen to her and then disappeared. At the trial, the ammo box could not be found.

The camp at Terezin did not get Slava after all. Sometime later, the Gestapo picked up and imprisoned even the children of half-Jews. Upon arrival of the Americans, Terezin was liberated, and the mass execution of the inmates was prevented at the last moment. Slava was an honest and true Sokol who believed in Sokol with her entire body and soul.

## THE SLOVAK UPRIISING

**EDITORIAL COMMENT.** Slovakia was an independent state during World War II, but they signed an agreement with Germany as a Nazi-aligned state. In 1944, 80,000 Slovak soldiers and about 18,000 civilians participated in an anti-fascist uprising. Although the campaign failed it placed Slovakia on the side of the allies. The Prague uprising, described in the next section, occurred in May of 1945.

We only knew about the Slovak uprising from reports we heard from the BBC or from radio reports from Moscow. To be caught listening to foreign radio reports was a crime punishable by death, but I was able to listen when I visited a farmer in Břeží. This farmer was unusual because generally, people did not want to risk listening to foreign broadcasts in the presence of others. On one occasion, a radio broadcast from Moscow reported that William Pauling, who was a bank director from Banská Bystrica (a town in central Slovakia), and prior

to the occupation a board member of ČOS, was at the heart of the uprising. During the occupation, he travelled to Prague once or twice annually to attend meetings conducted by the administrative board of chemical factories belonging to his bank. Prior to each trip, he was to notify me so I could meet with him in Prague. He was able to keep me informed about the preparations for the uprising among the lay leaders of the Slovak Evangelicals. He also told me that he had no faith or confidence in the Protectorate President Milan Hodža, who, in his opinion, was believed to be too closely allied with the Germans. Hodža had been Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia just before World War II.

The news of the uprising was of immense help to those of us in Bohemia and Moravia who were powerless to act, but we could feel a sincere gratitude, as Czechs, for the Slovaks. It was at this same time that we heard stories about abuse of humans by the communists, and about Soviet pretense to help. When the uprising had been suppressed, some prominent leaders were smuggled across the border to an area under the Soviet Union, but Pauling was purposely left behind. By now he was of advanced age, in poor health, very weak, and deserted by his fellow conspirators. He came down from the mountains to a city where he was arrested and taken to Berlin. We never heard what happened to him.

The Slovak uprising, despite immense sacrifices and the final failure, did have good repercussions for Czechoslovakia after the war ended. Had it not been for Pauling and the uprising, Slovakia would have been considered an ally of Hitler at the peace conference and would have suffered the consequences.

When Br. Pauling visited Prague, I always invited him for supper. He was embarrassed to receive my hospitality because he knew all food was rationed. He asked and received official permission to take a baked goose to Prague for use by his host. Half of the goose was for me and the other half for another friend. I did not eat my half of the goose, but wondered who I could give it to that needed it more. I remembered the Červínská family. The husband was an officer from Košice, but he was interned in a concentration camp. Because the family had moved to Prague after the establishment of the Slovak nation, his wife, unlike us, did not have any contacts that could give her an entry to the black market. When I carried my half of the goose to her, she declared that she would not

eat it herself, but that she would rewrap it and send it to her husband in the concentration camp.

## PRAGUE UPRISING

### *Introduction to Prague Uprising*

In 1944 the allies landed in Normandy, liberated France and advanced into Germany. At the same time, the Soviet Union with the tremendous help of tanks and equipment from the United States broke the siege at Stalingrad and began advancing toward the west. In accordance with the allied agreement at Yalta, the Soviet Union was to liberate the land up to the confluence of the Vltava and Labe rivers just north of Prague while the Western powers would liberate the rest. The allies committed themselves to ensure free elections and the installation of a freely elected government in the lands they liberated. The Western powers lived up to their agreement, but the Soviet Union installed communist puppets in the areas they passed through. This was done in Poland even though the Polish government, in power prior to the 1939 occupation, fled to England during the war and was recognized by all major countries as the Polish government in exile.

In 1945 the Soviet Union army, under General Malinovsky, liberated and then formed communist governments in Subcarpathian Rus (now part of Ukraine), Slovakia and Moravia. It conducted itself as an invading army in a captured land and engaged in arson and other forms of violence. General Patton, and the US Army in the spring of 1945, penetrated Bohemia, occupied Plzeň (Pilsen) and Rokycany, but then stopped at the request of the Soviet commander of the army approaching from the east.

**EDITORIAL COMMENT.** The original plan was to have the US Army liberate most of Czechoslovakia, including the capital. Even though Prague was calling for help, Soviet General Antonov on May 5, 1945, claimed that his troops were already liberating the city. However, Prague was not yet liberated. General Eisenhower supported the idea of having the US proceed with the original plan but did not want to offend the Soviets because they were a US Ally needed to help fight the Japanese. Had the original plan been carried out it is unlikely that Czechoslovakia would have become a communist country and a puppet of the Soviet Union.

In London, the Czech Beneš continued with his political thesis that Czechoslovakia should act as a bridge

between the Eastern and Western powers once peace was established. Beneš' exile government had remained in contact with the people of Czechoslovakia via British radio. The voice of the exiled government was Beneš' secretary, Prokop Drtina, using the pseudonym Pavel Holy, who through his broadcast, maintained the spirit of the resistance. Within the Protectorate, every radio had to display, theoretically, a small card which called attention to the fact that listening to broadcasts from the government in exile was punishable by death. Despite the warning, the BBC broadcasts were listened to by the general population and, thereby, most people remained informed of the current news.

In April 1945, it became clear that the end of the war was rapidly approaching and that the Nazis intended to destroy Prague as they retreated toward Germany. I realized that in the event Prague was either destroyed or encircled, food would become very scarce, so I decided to journey to Rendlíček to obtain and then return with some supplies. I gathered four suitcases, two large ones and two smaller ones that fit inside the larger ones and set out on my journey. I planned to travel on a night train after deciding that while traveling by night would be uncomfortable, generally night trains were less crowded and were safer from allied aircraft. In those days the British pilots made a practice of destroying train engines that attempted to move during daylight hours. When I neared the station, I decided to travel by a day train after all, so I put my suitcases into a locker and went home to spend the night in my own bed. That evening there was some nearby bombing, but I remained in bed.

I started my trip by traveling on the train the next morning. Before we reached Kolín, just east of Prague, we received an order to take our luggage and walk to another train that was waiting for us. On the previous night Kolín was bombed and the night train I had planned to take had been destroyed. Once again, I was rescued by my subconsciousness. The railroad tracks were destroyed for long distances along my route. From Havlíčkův Brod to Ždár (two cities in the Bohemian-Moravian Highlands), we had to transfer many times because nearly all the bridges had been destroyed.

When the station master at Ždár saw me, he was surprised and asked me why I was there. When I explained the purpose of my trip, he wanted to know how I intended to get the supplies back to Prague. I said, obvi-

ously, by a baggage car where there was some protection from a search by the Gestapo. If I tried to take the suitcases in a private car and we were stopped, the occupants would be identified, whereas some unmarked luggage in a baggage car could belong to anyone. The station master then informed me that baggage cars were no longer used because at each break in the line, the baggage would have to be carried to the next train. Since I was there anyway, I decided not to return empty-handed, and would rather look for someone to take me to Havlíčkův Brod. The station master, with a doubtful smile, wished me luck and I then set out for Rendlíček.

We had some money in the cottage, and it was easy to buy many things in the neighborhood where the farmers knew me and were willing to sell. One farmer had previously promised me a pig, but now he announced that he could only let me have a half because he promised the other half to a convalescent home for children. In addition, from my half, I needed to give a piece to Professor Albert Pražák of the Academy of Sciences and a piece to the widow of General Bílý. I gladly agreed to these conditions, but confided in him about the difficulty that I would encounter returning home. He provided a solution to that problem as well. In the next several days, he was to send his son to Brod to have some repair work done on his tractor and I could go along. Meanwhile, the word quickly spread that I was there, and I would be returning to Prague in a few days. Many mothers began dropping in with packages for me to deliver to their children in Prague. When the tractor arrived for us to begin our trip, I had a total of 17 pieces of luggage and parcels to take with me. While the trip on the tractor was not pleasant, I could not suppress my feelings of the joy that I would deliver the items.

At the railroad station in Brod, the boys placed my treasure by the scales for luggage. The man at the scales looked at me and gravely winked. "To Prague! After the war," he said. I explained how I had obtained the packages and that it was food for many people who would need it if they were to live to see the end of the siege of Prague. He then said, 'You came through Kolín, so you know the situation there. There are no baggage cars and, while there are several ways you could go to eventually reach Prague, all these routes also have bridges out, so there is no way to move your luggage to Prague by rail.' As I stood over my pile like Jeremiah above the ruins of Jerusalem, a

light came on in my head. I knew a friend in Chotěboř in the Bohemian-Moravian Highlands who was a manufacturer. He was forced to work for the Germans and frequently transported his product to Prague by truck. I wondered if he would take the risk to transport me, so I called from the Post Office, but because telephone conversation was dangerous, I asked him if I could pay him a visit. He agreed.

I then turned to the man at the scale and asked if the rail line to Chotěboř was still in good condition and without any breaks. When I found it was in operating shape, I placed my luggage on the train and continued my journey.

My friend, Eckhart, had expressed his willingness to help me. So, when I arrived at Chotěboř, I found a fire engine waiting to assist me in travelling to Eckhart's home. When I asked why a fire engine, he told me a car would have been more suspicious. I travelled to Prague the next day in a heavy truck and was happy that the trip was without any inspection.

### ***The Prague uprising***

In Prague, the tension mounted as the war neared its end. We were all aware of Hitler's threat that if he had to abandon Prague, he would mine the city and the resulting blast would be heard all over Europe. In the week before May 5th, I was called by a known representative of the national underground and informed that the organization had fears that Hitler would carry out his threat of mining important buildings, including Tyrš' House. He wanted me to contact a specialist who could conduct a thorough examination of the structure before Monday, which was the day slated for the uprising against the Nazi garrison.

On the preceding Friday evening, I invited a group of women instructors to my apartment for a meeting regarding how we could restore the Sokol organization as fast as possible after our liberation. During the meeting, a call came from the husband of Libuše Kovářova, who was on duty at a rescue station, and who informed her that there was some shooting in the streets. He wanted her to go home immediately. Even though Sister Pešek confided to me that the uprising would not start until the following Monday, I was not able to convince the others to stay and thus, the sisters departed without any conclusions being reached at the meeting.

On Saturday, the following day, I agreed to journey with my brother to search for some sugar. We had been in a small town for perhaps an hour when we heard music and shouting. We ran into the streets and saw many Czechoslovak flags displayed on houses. At the railroad station we discovered that there was no railway connection to Prague. Our cousin offered us bicycles and a raincoat for me. We accepted and started on the road for our destination. On the way to Prague, we stopped to see Sokol District Director Zora Kadeřábková. She did not want us to stay with her overnight because she lived on the main road to Kleby, district of Prague, used by the German army as a main avenue for communications. Instead, she took us to a Sokol sister's house where we spent the night.

In the morning, it was not possible to continue by bike because of the muddy roads, so we left them and continued our journey on foot. We decided to use a roundabout route over field roads to reach our destination. We travelled to the Bohemian-Moravian Highlands. But before our departure from Prague, we met a Sokol brother from Karlín who indicated that he had been told to leave a barricade and return home because he did not have a gun and the resistance committee did not have one to spare. He cautioned us to be especially careful at the end of the electric streetcar line because the Nazis were using it as a target in their retreat from Kleby. When we arrived at the station, we came under small arms fire, but fortunately the bullets hit into the wall of a building, and we were able to run for cover. On the final leg of our road trip to Prague, we passed through 48 barricades manned by our resistance forces.

My brother proceeded to his home in Karlín and as I made my way toward my apartment, I travelled on Petřská Street where I encountered gunfire. I took shelter in the passage of a house, when suddenly, I heard laughter coming from the opposite passage. There a man was pulling splinters of glass from his side pocket where apparently a bullet had shattered a bottle. By traveling in a roundabout manner, I arrived at Rytířská Street, in Old Town, and there I decided that, since I was so close, I would visit the only remaining vice president of Sokol, Brother Kavalír who resided at Wenceslas Square.

I found the square empty, although fire still smoldered in some of the buildings. At the Kavalír home, his military guard, who had spent the night there, opened

the door. Apparently, Kavalír's first concern was to have a guard. I was shown into the house where he greeted me with words of assurance that he was still a member of the national committee, but he knew nothing else. My trip from his house to my apartment now became the most adventurous part of my journey.

I travelled through passages, then cellars that connected to other passages, which had been designed as an escape route in the event the house was bombed, and people were trapped in the cellar. I finally made my way to the riverbank where I was stopped by guards. They told me the bridge was being raked by small arms gunfire from Petřín (Lesser Town, Prague) and the same situation existed at the Bridge of Legions. They advised me to try to cross the river via the Charles Bridge. I then made my way to Karolíny Světlé street, where people called to me from passages that it was not safe to travel farther. They asked me where I came from and where I was going. As I answered their questions, I suddenly realized how I looked.

There was mud on my clothes, face, raincoat, dress, and underwear. I was wet through and through and I was shaking from the cold. It was high time that I got home, which was just across the river, but the guards did not want me to attempt the crossing. After a long delay, the guards finally let me try crossing. As I began to cross the bridge, my passage was noticed by the soldiers, and they began shooting at me. I took cover in a niche of the stair railing and when the firing stopped, I advanced to another niche before the firing started again. Finally, after what seemed an eternity, I completed my crossing and arrived at my home.

Two Sokol sisters who lived in my apartment with me welcomed me with the news that Sister Vokáč had visited and waited all morning but had to leave. On a street corner near my home, she had found a dying boy and took him to an aide station. When she arrived home, she found her adopted daughter lying dead in a pool of her blood. The girl had apparently gone to look out the window when she heard shooting in the streets and the Nazis passing by shot her. Sister Vokáč had adopted the girl after her parents were killed during the occupation of Eastern Slovakia by the Hungarians and had cared for her as her own.

Brother Hřebík telephoned me from the shop area of Tyrš House where the Sokol employees were lodged

during the occupation of the house by the Germans. He had travelled about 80 miles from Zbraslav (a small town near Brno) by foot and had hoped to spend the night at the shop. František Beneš, the secretary of ČOS, was with him. I invited both to my home, which was approximately a five-minute walk from Tyrš House. We remained there, until the liberation was over. During the entire period of the uprising, I was in telephone contact with the brothers, who were watching the Staroměstská Radnice (Oldtown town hall), and with the national committee, in session on Bartolomějská Street, but without Br. Kavalír.

**EDITORIAL COMMENT.** The success of the Prague uprising was aided by General Andrei Vlasov of the Russian Liberation Armed Forces, who had originally collaborated with the Germans. However, on May 5, 1945, he joined the anti-Nazis before the Red Army arrived, after the war was over.

On Monday, the second day of the uprising, General Vlasov passed through Prague along with the captured and/or arrested Germans. In my apartment building lived a German Professor, a democrat. If it had not been for his cook, who was a fanatic Nazi, he would not have displayed the German (Nazi) flag. Vlasov captured the two Germans, and his men searched the apartment for food. While none of the large stock of spirits was touched, the food was taken and distributed to the needy outside our building. Our building custodian witnessed Vlasov take a ring from the finger of a female captive and give it to a poor woman standing on the sidewalk watching the action. Vlasov then proceeded to take into custody all remaining German soldiers in the vicinity of Prague and those who had been lodged in barracks, two blocks from my home. By the end of Monday, May 7, Prague was secure, and all street firing had ceased. The next day, General Vlasov, with his army of Bohemian rebels, left Prague to contact the Americans and turn over the city to them before the Russians could arrive. Unfortunately, the Russians now swept through Northern Bohemia and entered Prague where they were enthusiastically greeted as liberators. Prague was liberated by General Vlasov and his Bohemian rebels, but Vlasov was then captured by the Russians and hung for the crime of treason. I subsequently learned that Many Russian and Ukrainian soldiers captured by the Germans volunteered to fight with

the Germans against the Soviet Union.

On Sunday evening we listened to radio London, which reported that Czechoslovak pilots were to fly their planes to Prague. The English pilots formed a cordon of honor for the Czech fliers through which they passed on their way home. We heard nothing further for a time and finally we heard that our pilots had been ordered to return to England after completing a part of their trip. Who gave the return order or why it was given was never explained to us.

I do not know if it was on Monday or Tuesday when one of our sister instructors, who was employed in the inter-city exchange, informed us that the Rokycany exchange was reporting that the American Army was marching from Pilsen to Prague. She kept us informed on the progress of the Americans by reporting they had passed through Mýto, then Holoubkov (towns in the Pilsen district), and many other towns, but then, with dismay, she reported they had stopped. She asked if we knew why they had stopped, but, of course, we did not know. We then learned that some American vehicles were continuing the trip and finally, we could hear the cheering as they arrived in town. The American delegation offered their help to the National Committee, but the Vice President Josef Smrkovský refused their offer, so the delegation returned to their troops.

Brothers Hřebík and František Beneš stayed with me in my apartment the entire period of the uprising and did not venture into the streets until May 8, when the

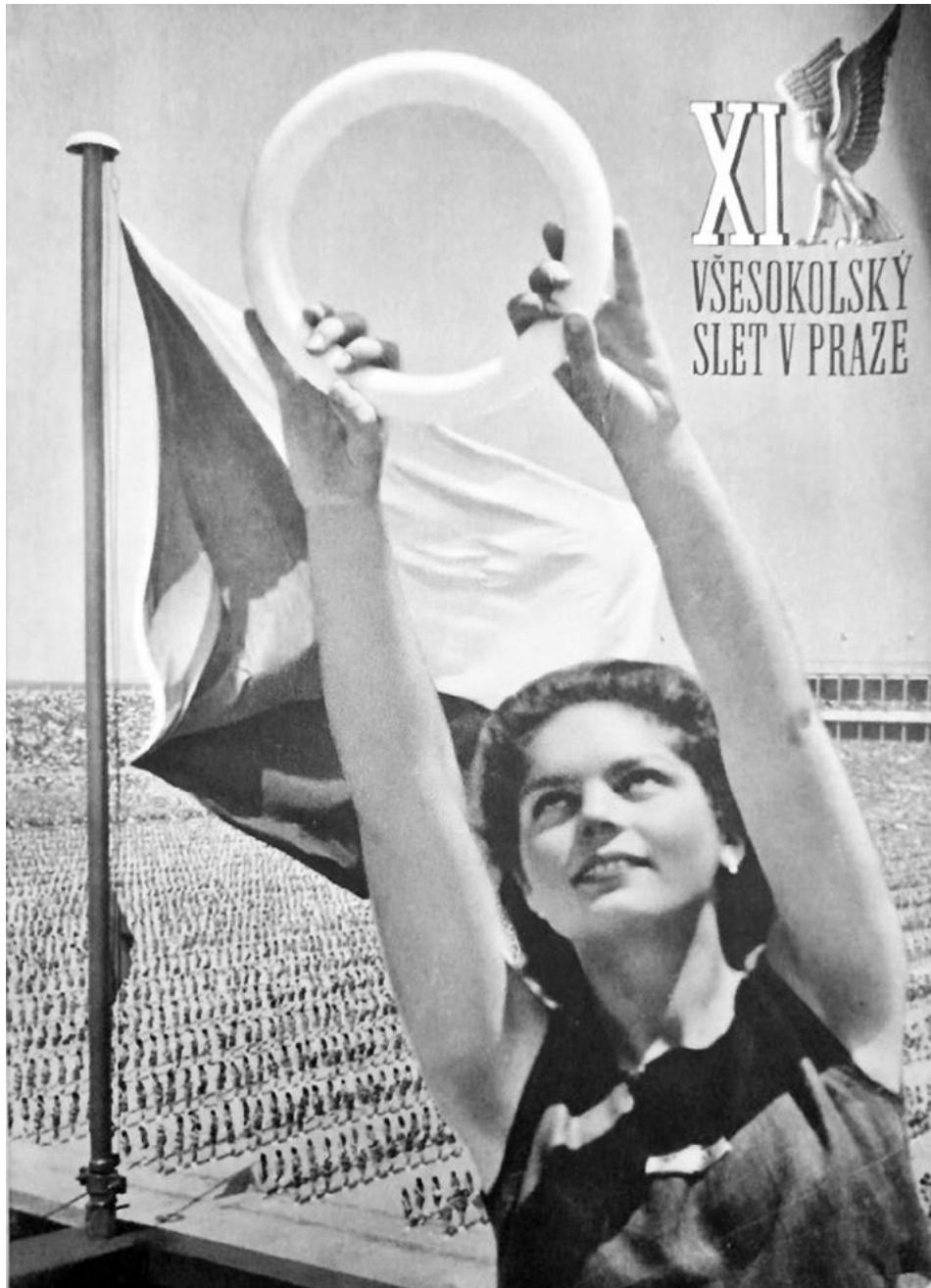
Russian Army was already in the city. Currently, I also had two sisters living with me, who were renting one of my spare rooms. We were also joined by two more Sokol brothers, so altogether, we had quite a troop. Beneš joined our discussions and exchanges of information, but Br. Hřebík stayed pretty much to himself and only rarely entered our conversation.

Br. Truhlář, who according to the ČOS Committee, remained the President of Sokol, but was still missing and apparently somewhere on the road from the concentration camp to Prague. Br. Hřebík took it upon himself to organize the preparation for the period following the uprising. He called a meeting of the National Committee at the Prague Sokol because the Tyrš House was still not accessible for us; the main gym floor had been converted into a hospital and the other rooms were used by the Germans to house the Protectorate's offices of the Gestapo. Suddenly, after the uprising, the communists took over the house for their own use and did not want to release the building to their rightful owner.

When I came into the Prague Sokol building for the Board of Instructors meeting, I saw for the first time since his arrest, Brother Truhlář speaking to Klinger. Because he was talking to Klinger, I did not approach him, but chose to wait and welcome him to the meeting later. Unfortunately, he did not attend the meeting, chaired by Br. Hřebík, and all present accepted the situation without comment. From the leaders of the men's instructional staff, only the second vice president, Kavalír, remained.



Legionnaires from World War I, participating in the 1938 Slet.



Poster for the 1948 XI Slet; the last until 1994, after the Velvet Revolution.



## THE DAWN OF LIBERTY

### FREEDOM, BUT UNCERTAINTY

We were liberated but the mood was a far cry from the cheering, joy and relief that was apparent in the streets of Prague in October 1918 (when Czechoslovakia was established). This time the feeling of anxiety and uncertainty prevailed. For too long we had listened to broadcasts from abroad despite the danger of death if we had been caught. Our status was still not clear, and the feeling of freedom remained vague. The fallen men from the barricades were still not buried and those who had outlived the horror of the Nazi concentration camps were still not home. How many of the internees would return was a question which burned in our minds.

Suddenly many red stars began appearing on the lapels of people we would never have suspected that they held such (communist) views. During the second world war, communist propaganda had apparently worked in many environments and had infiltrated many circles. In Bohemia and Moravia, there were many elements of the Protectorate government who collaborated with the communists. Even democrats were taken in by the propaganda. Communists within these organizations used propaganda to influence their fellow workers through untruths and slanted information. Even Stalin's collaboration with Hitler and the subsequent division of Poland was explained away as a pretense of friendship to be used later as bait when the proper moment arrived. At the time of the Munich conference, the communists claimed that they were the only friend who remained faithful to Czechoslovakia. At that time, they said they could not act because Poland and Romania refused them permission to either cross or overfly their territory. Later it was proven that the Soviets never asked for such permission. The Soviets also passed out information that

during the Prague uprising, the American army sat idly near Pilsen and Rokycany, while the Russian army, after capturing Berlin, sped to the aid of Prague. This occurred solely because the Soviets insisted that Patten's army not continue further into Czechoslovakia. Unfortunately, the liberation of Prague was falsely credited to the Soviet Union. The inhabitants of Prague quickly forgot their own experiences that involved arresting German supporters and how many German soldiers used their native Russian tongue to beg for their lives. Only a handful of dedicated Czech leaders knew that it was really the army soldiers of General Vlasov's army, who were no longer a part of the Red Army, and who were the only liberators of Prague.

Under the influence of Soviet propaganda, even many former teachers and other educational personnel soon fell prey to the many lies about communist policies and support. While the Sokol organization was not taken over by the communists, there did exist some infiltration into the Sokol ranks. Many questions were asked, such as why President Beneš travelled to and through Moscow on his way back from London to Prague. Many also wondered how so many communists surfaced in politically important positions in the government. This was a time when there was great uncertainty and lack of confidence in our future, which was so unlike the situation that existed in October 1918.

In all totalitarian and dictatorship regimes, a major emphasis is to control and influence the thoughts of the subjugated people. This action enables the regime to implement programs which strengthen their hold over the people. In a democracy, the opposite is true, i.e., all programs are carefully debated from all angles and the resulting actions are truly the will of the people. During

World War II, the fascists used propaganda to unify the people within their sphere of influence. After the war the communists used this same technique to control their occupied territories. They even tried to justify their crimes through false information. The end of the war provided the communists with an excellent opportunity to drastically change the political structure of occupied countries. Even in the German concentration camps, the communists collaborated with the Germans to gain advantage over the other inmates, especially those who were of a different political persuasion. They even penetrated the Czechoslovak Army in France and later in exile in England.

The wartime interactions of Sokol activity ended with the staff meeting in December 1945. During the war, the activity had mostly been conducted underground with the resistance movement and in support of the Sokol families that had been deprived of those who had supported them. Even this limited activity was not without its sacrifices. If during house-to-house searches any evidence of support for Sokol was found, the punishment was death. The Sokol resistance movement had been heavily damaged through the mass arrest of Sokol members and through the destruction of resistance groups serving under General Bílý. The homecoming volunteers from the Czechoslovak Army and Air Force, as well as the political employees of the Government in exile, brought disturbing news of the inroads that Communism had made into the fabric of our people. Even President Beneš capitulated to the demands made by Moscow. According to a journalist's information, when some members of the Czech government serving as the vanguard of Beneš' trip to Moscow left Russia, they learned that the president had agreed to allow the key minister positions of interior, defense, and information to be filled by communists. In a similar manner, he dropped his support for a program to unify physical training and sport activities. From Moscow, Beneš came back with a program that suited all the demands made on Czechoslovakia by the communists.

All the efforts by the communists to control the Czech government had a major influence on the outcome of the first election in the restored Czechoslovak Republic. The communists were the strongest single party acquiring 31.5% of the votes. In Bohemia, they received 43.25%, in Moravia 34% and in Slovakia, where the people were

more familiar with communist treason, the democrats received 62% of the vote. The final vote result could, to a considerable measure, be attributed to the success of the communist propaganda during the war. It was particularly due to the uncertainty and loss of confidence in the former leaders and their political parties, especially those who advocated the abolishment of the former agrarian party.

Julius Firt, a Czech journalist, who was a candidate of the Nationalist Socialist Party from the area of Horaždovice (a small town about 30 miles south of Pilsen), expected an easy victory because he had many friends and supporters, as well as co-workers in his native area. When he failed to be elected, he asked an old friend why the friend had voted against him. His friend replied, "It is this way. When I vote against you and you win, nothing will happen to me, but if I vote against the communists and you win, things will be bad for me."

Among the communist's strengths were spreading misinformation, and reporting false election returns. It seemed you could not believe most of what you heard. When my daughter met a fellow skier, an old friend, she asked him if he was a communist. His answer was telling for he said, "Do not forget I am from Havlovice, a town near the Polish border, where there was not one vote for the Communist Party." Later from the newspaper we learned that the communists in Havlovice had received more than 98.25% of the votes. While the election resulted in few actual gains for the communists in the government, it greatly strengthened their self-esteem and confidence for the future. I believe that the election results opened many people's eyes as to the threat, not only to the country, but also to the Sokol movement.

In the days following the end of the war, Sokol was besieged by many membership applications. By taking a stance for democracy, Sokol put forth their strong anti-communist views. I was stopped in an unexpected encounter with Minister of Justice, Prokop Drtina who said, "I am so ashamed because I am not yet a member of Sokol. Please tell me how I can become a member." This situation was like what we faced in 1918 when acceptance of applicants for membership had to be slow and limited by the ČOS board. We could not take the same actions now because so many of the applicants wanted to join Sokol since it was their only defense against the communist invasion. Just as the communists could not

bring about their increase in seats in the government, we could not revel in the large number of applicants for Sokol membership. Moreover, we had strong reservations about many of the new members.

**EDITORIAL COMMENT.** Prokop Drtina is an example of a politician who was devoted to Czechoslovakia and democracy but believed that the Soviet influence was just a passing phase. This belief cost him his freedom, as he was imprisoned by the communists.

When, in December 1945, Sokol proclaimed the restoration of their organization and activity, the communist leadership ordered their members to join Sokol and to seek high office. Our units announced they were receiving lists of personnel for membership which contained 20, 30 and even 50 names on one sheet of paper. Of course, the units knew what to do to avoid the situation. They returned the lists and ordered that individual applications would be required, and each applicant would be required to complete an orientation program before their application would be considered. It was essential that I truthfully report that when the applications of Klement Gottwald (Communist Party leader) and Antonín Zápotocký (prime minister) were being considered, that I asked our board if they had completed the school for new members. My answer was an ironic smile by Hřebík, and it was in this vein that the action was completed.

Sokol activity in units and districts now proceeded with surprising enthusiasm and beyond all expectations. I had feared that because Sokol had been weakened by the loss of so many of its leaders; therefore the units would be slow in achieving a high level of education for their new members. I was wrong. Sokol enthusiastically responded to the sound of its name and to the environment which it hoped to provide. New members made a surprisingly fast adjustment to their new roles and quickly merged with the Sokols who had lived through the war. I was fully convinced that everything would be fine because I had my own unit, Smichov I, to offer as an example.

Like many units, our Sokol hall was taken over by the Nazis and used to store confiscated Jewish family furniture. The first act of each unit was to allocate duties to members to vacate the furniture and clean all the rooms. This work united us. After the furniture was removed,

the women were assigned the task of cleaning the floors, while the men were given the task of cleaning the walls and windows. I did not let them take away my duty of scrubbing my small area of the floor, as I felt I could not turn over my responsibility to my brothers and sister Sokols. We all met there, happy to do our part. The oldest members distributed the water and cleaning materials while those who could not work contributed financially by purchasing the cleaning items. Everyone wanted to have a part in the operation. Americans call it to be a part of the "in" crowd while we would call it "a working part of the total."

In Prague, we suffered very little damage to our buildings during the war, but that was not the case in many other areas. In Southern Moravia, where Malinovsky led his Soviet army in the fight against the Germans, there was wide destruction. In November or December of 1945, I drove through Moravian Ostrava to Hlucinsko (near the Polish border). The battlefield had passed through the city three times and not a single building stood in the entire city. The weather was already very cool and everywhere there was a coating of snow. There were no lights above ground, but we could see rays of light coming from the cellars which were occupied by the former inhabitants. Because glass was impossible to obtain, the inhabitants had nailed boards over the windows which accounted for the strips of light we saw on the ground. Our guard assured us that together the people were addressing their problems. They had already rebuilt their school, church and Sokol hall and now they were getting together to rebuild houses, with priority to be given to families with small children or people who were ill.

Similar news concerning a rebuilding program came from other Moravian places, mostly from the locations where our so-called liberators had travelled. Once again, prior to repairing their homes, they built their school, church and Sokol hall.

In preparing myself for one of my ancillary areas of work, I attended a class sponsored by the chief of the Ministry for Education and Physical Culture. One of my class leaders was a Russian who was presenting a series of classes for ministry officials. He explained to us that, during the war in the Ukraine, there were strong feelings against communism and entire regiments wanted to defect from the Soviet army and to fight for the Germans.

These regiments felt they would be able to take over the liberated Ukraine once the Soviets were defeated. The Germans, of course, had no intention of liberating Ukraine, but rather intended to capture it for their own purposes. When the committee from the Ukrainian regiments, under a white flag, approached the German lines, the Germans shot them. This action opened the eyes of the dissidents and caused them to change their views and cooperate in the defense of Moscow.

During war, the Soviet government moved out of Moscow because the loss of their capitol would have been a serious blow to the nation. A group of former Czarist Generals agreed to form a regiment of volunteers to defend the capital. Their volunteer unit was willing to sacrifice their lives in the defense of Moscow. Most members of this unit were employees of the Orthodox church and were living off the charity of the church members. Approximately 1,000 men were organized into a unit which successfully defended the capitol against the Germans. Many acts of bravery occurred during their exploits. One technique they used was to tie explosives to the body of a volunteer who would then throw himself into the lead tank of a column which had been forced to stay on the narrow road because of the muddy terrain. When the Germans tried to bypass the disabled lead tank, a second volunteer would then disable the second tank. Soon there was such a jam on the road that the Germans were not able to advance, and the Russian artillery could then destroy the other vehicles in the column.

Similar stories were told to us by members of the official delegation to Moscow so there had to be some element of truth in the tale. Even though the stories sounded too fantastic to be true, the frequent repeating of the story caused us to believe the tale and feel that a monument should have been erected in the memory of such brave soldiers.

## MOSCOW

**EDITORIAL COMMENT.** The post-World War II trip to Moscow by Provažníková and colleagues revealed a great deal about the communist system and its effects on gymnastics and physical education. During the first few decades of the twentieth century, the Sokol system was embraced by Slavic countries in terms of both sport and physical training. However, the idea of Sokol, a democratic organization and philosophy, was incompatible

with the communist doctrine. This is clearly documented in this section. The Sokol system, like that of the German Turners, is a physical training system defined by the term "gymnastics," in its broadest definition. Physical education is a term that encompasses a variety of physical exercises and sports in educational institutions.

The Second World War brought powerful support to the ever-widening communistic areas of influence. The Soviets gained many friends by their strong opposition against Hitler's Germany, and through their partnership with their English and American allies. Through clever use of propaganda, the Soviets mislead many people concerning their true relationship with the Allies. It was like the erroneous thinking that had misled the Eastern European states when the communists had overthrown the supporters of the Czar. Little did the Czar's opponents realize that they were only changing from one dictatorship to another. Very quickly people forgot Stalin's treaty with Hitler that facilitated the combined German-Soviet assault and division of Poland. These events had been forgotten in the wake of Nazi German horror.

Some of our younger women, who offered to help in the restoration of Sokol activity at Tyrš House saw, felt that the Soviet repulse of the German armies validated the communist way of thinking and doing things. In addition to other demands that they made, they wanted women to refrain from performing apparatus exercises and limiting their exercise to calisthenics. In the Czech language, gymnastics is defined as the contemporary progressive steps in physical exercises which was commonly accepted as both calisthenics and movements on an apparatus. When I asked for the reason behind their request of limiting woman's physical activity, they became embarrassed and finally admitted it was the way it was done in the Soviet Union, and we should use their example as our guide.

I became curious as to the source of their allegation and asked to be instructed by the Czechoslovak communist delegate of physical training, František Jerabek. He admitted that no one in Czechoslovakia knew about Soviet physical education. Before and during the war, there had been little contact or information exchanged regarding physical education. In the few weeks since the end of the war, there was not enough time to exchange any information. The only source of information he knew about was the bible on Soviet phys-

ical education contained in a book entitled *Gimnastika* which was compulsory for schools and all army volunteers. The book explained techniques and was the source of information upon which new members called themselves "advanced students." What these converts did not know was that in the Russian language, the word "gimnastika" means the same as in Czech and in other Slavic languages, i.e., "physical training." I could not find out what the contents of the book advocated.

In August the Ministry of Schools appointed an official member of a delegation to journey to Moscow for the purpose of establishing a relationship, and to contact the leading representatives of Soviet physical education. There were four of us in the delegation. I represented the Ministry of Schools, Jiří Král, the Ministry of Health, and an officer from the General Staff, who was a former legionnaire, represented the Ministry of National Defense. The fourth member of our group was a newly "baked" communist, Professor Hanák. From the first day of the restoration of the Republic, a tradition was founded whereby each state delegation had to include at least one communist member. As soon as we arrived at the Prague airport, Hanák tried to make his presence felt. He said that we cannot fly into the Soviet Union wearing a Sokol badge because the Soviets dislike the Sokols because of the legionnaire's activities following WWI. I answered that I was not going to make love to anyone or apply for Soviet love. The badge belonged to me, and it would stay displayed on my garment.

We flew to Moscow in an old Dakota airplane which had about ten seats on each side and large bundles on which the other passengers were to sit. Before reaching Warsaw, the pilot reported that he would fly low so we could see what was left of the city after the disastrous attempt by the Poles to free their city in the last year of the war. The Polish uprising had counted on the Russians to help them free themselves from the yoke of German occupation. The Russian army, which had advanced to the suburban area of Warsaw, just across the Vistula River, sat and waited while the resistance movement expended itself. The Soviets did not want to share the liberation honors with anyone, even though the Poles were willing to give their lives so they could share in the liberation. The Soviets desired to appear to be the only country in Europe who liberated capitals of occupied countries so they could then extract their price for the freedom.

What we saw in the center of Warsaw was a gigantic gravel pit where once stood many beautiful buildings. Only one building was spared during the bombing and it stood among the ruins and still contained the park-like grounds which, with its rock-formed walls, extended to the Vistula River. I recognized the building as the palace of the Zamoiski family (royal family of 16th century). My last time in Warsaw was in February 1939, when we attended a meeting of the Technical Committee of Federation of International Gymnastics at the Zamoiski Palace.

Soon after my return to Prague, Jadwiga Zamonska's son visited me and carried an appeal from her to help him contact the American Army. He confirmed my recognition of their palace in Warsaw which was saved from the bombing and added that the palace was now the residence of the American delegation. Concerning his mother, he stated she was now at a health resort and was supporting herself by operating a machine which makes knitted sweaters.

In Moscow, we were the guests of the Soviet Union. On our second day, we met a professor from the Lenin institute who introduced himself as our official guide. When he saw my Sokol badge, he told me to be on guard. Then he added that he is also an old Sokol who had attended one of our gymnastics teacher's courses. He further added that before the war, he was one of hundreds who had received the same training. We were assigned a taxi for our transportation during our visit. Each morning our guide would arrive in our cab, stay with us all day, and then leave in the cab at night. At that time, it was necessary to ask for a cab in writing if we wanted to travel without a guide to unescorted areas. In addition to our guide, another professor from the Lenin Institute would arrive each day to give us a one-hour lecture. When he first arrived, he introduced himself as a former Sokol and assured us that the only physical training in the Soviet Union was based on the Sokol system.

In vain we asked to visit some physical education sessions, but there was always some excuse why we could not go. Although it was August and all the children were on school vacation, we thought perhaps there were some classes of teenagers being taught gymnastics. The playgrounds and parks were empty, and the excuse we received was that the children were in camps, although the streets seemed to be filled with them. Finally in the first week of September, our group was able to attend a

one-hour period of physical training. Unfortunately, I was not able to join the tour as my colleagues designated me as their representative at a dinner organized in the absence of the ambassador. The report regarding training was brief, and the entire period was filled with a type of "follow-the-leader activities."

One of the primary goals of the trip was to visit the Institute of Physical Education, which is the highest specialty school in the Soviet Union. All our efforts were ineffective, and we were beginning to believe it was only a facade. I had to work hard to prevent Dr. Král, who was threatening to ask our innocent guide, if there really was an institute. The excuse we received in the first week was that the director was on vacation, and then in the second week we could not visit because the institute was being repaired.

My main interest was to obtain a copy of the book *Gimnastika*, which remained a mystery, but despite my efforts, I was unable to locate a copy. In all the bookstores the story was the same, the book was sold out and the new edition was being printed. In the stores we saw only propaganda items for sale and our guide told us this was the usual situation. There was a large need for paper and every new edition was immediately sold out, so the situation always remained the same. We saw in every store a large volume of communist propaganda which probably accounted for the major paper shortage. I finally gave up trying to find a copy of the book. We spent ten days in Moscow and attended museums, galleries, theaters, operas, and ballets. Although we heard many lectures and saw many films, we saw only one game of soccer and witnessed a one-hour class in the "follow-me" game.

At home, after more than five years' interruption, the ČOS was being re-established, and I was anxious to return and be a part of the activity. I decided that the audience of the Soviet Ministry would have to do without me, so I prepared for my return trip. Later I learned that my illustrious companion, Dr. Hanák, had, thereafter, worn his Sokol badge to all further meetings and lectures as a proud symbol, and in memory of the accomplishments of the Czech legionnaires.

When I was preparing my luggage for the return trip home, I found my shoe-box full of sugar cubes. I had been warned by my friends when I was packing for the original trip that there were great shortages in Moscow and particularly sugar, so I had packed the box.

We did not have a sugar shortage at home, so it would have been absurd to carry the box from Russia back to Czechoslovakia. Our constant guide, who was a dear and sincere man, had kept us informed not only about our accommodations, but also about the restrictions on foodstuffs allowed the Russian people. One of his sons had died of hunger in the siege of Leningrad and the second son had never tasted an apple. When we had arrived, he had graciously accepted a beautifully bound, memorial of a Slet, but such a rare gift as a box of sugar, he could not accept. He finally accepted the sugar after I told him how many crowns it had cost. The following day he brought me a package which contained the *Gimnastika* book. He had obtained the copy by exchanging a book at the library for one I had previously given him.

In the book, *Gimnastika*, I found all my old friends: horizontal bar, parallel bars, rings, horse, and Indian clubs. They were old friends by performance and gym suits, as I remembered them from the time before WWI. The arrangements and compositions in *Gimnastika* were identical to a book written by Franta Erben (Erben's Siberian Novelties). He wrote his book in 1909 just prior to leaving Bohemia, and the drills were as we had performed them at that time and prior to that date. Now in Czechoslovakia, thirty years later, we had progressed much further.

Before the first World War, Franta Erben had worked as a physical educator at the officer's academy in Petersburg. I know how he arrived there from stories I heard told by some of the older brothers. When the Czar's government decided to incorporate physical training into the army, as was being done by most European states, they invited a few outstanding teachers of different training styles (German, Swedish, Czech and others) to come to Russia. The ČOS sent Franta Erben, who at that time was one of its traveling instructors. The management of the Army Academy arranged for the teachers to present their method of instruction, and specialists were assigned to follow the training to select the method with the best results. The Sokol method was selected as the best of the lot and Erben was chosen to introduce Sokol education into all phases of Russian military training. The decision to select the Sokol method confirmed the quality of our training and acknowledged its worth in developing physically fit participants. The students with this training would eventually become founders

of Sokol units in the regions of their work assignments. Erben was not the first Czech teacher of physical training in Russia; that honor is given to Br. Grumlík who taught in Tiflis in 1889.

I enjoyed watching the faces of the progressive female instructors when I showed them the copy of the Soviet physical training bible, *Gimnastika*. Unfortunately, I lost track of the book after ČOS was dissolved, because I loaned it to a sister who was preparing for some examinations and she, in turn, had loaned the book to an individual that she no longer remembered. Still, we had to thank Soviet Ambassador Zorin for the reception he gave us in Moscow. He was amused when I suggested to him that the film of the 10th Sokol Slet which we had brought for Stalin should be shown to all the Soviet people.

### THE STRUGGLE FOR UNIFICATION

The question of unifying all gymnastics training and sports in the country had originally surfaced during the very emotional times in the autumn of 1938 when the border areas were taken from us by the Nazis. It had then been necessary to re-organize practically our entire public life into a so-called "Second Republic," so the unification problem was set aside.

In the autumn of 1938, the ČOS Central Committee came out very strongly against any unification of all forms of physical training in the country. The action stopped all further movement on unification within Sokol, until it was dissolved in 1941. Miroslav Kavalír, Sokol Director of Men, thus the holder of the second-highest office in Sokol, did not stop his efforts in support of the program. He was also the secretary of education at the national level, which after 1939, remained a political entity. Kavalír did not discontinue his activity to implement the unification program despite the ČOS action taken in 1938. I am certain that his strong support of the program was one of the main reasons that Augustin Pechlát, Director of Men, refused to allow his name to be submitted in nomination for President. I went to the chairman of the nominating committee, to support Pechlát's position. Unfortunately, my actions were in vain, as the chairman supported Kavalír's election, because he had survived a concentration camp experience with him, and a strong hand of friendship had developed between them.

Hřebík alternated his position on unification by

either supporting or opposing it based on the environment in which he was operating. In a ČOS board meeting, he assured the members that unification would not happen, then in some staff meeting, he expressed his belief that it would be realized. In one instance, when President Beneš was in the audience, he passed on false information, which I could not tolerate. Following Hřebík's statement, I told the same audience that the attitude in Sokol was so negative that, despite what Hřebík said, I could not see how the resistance to the idea could be overcome.

Even before the Prague uprising, Kavalír told Hřebík and me about his contacts with two agents from the worker's physical training units, Dělnická Tělocviná Jednota (DTJ). With these agents, he had negotiated the possibility of uniting DTJ with Sokol. DTJ was well-known to Sokol, and we were familiar with their policy of recruiting their members from the Socialist Democratic Party, which was the core of their membership. If they were admitted into Sokol, this deviation in membership criteria would have to be removed. We met with the agents several times and they assured us that DTJ would accept all Sokol's ideals and concepts if the merger was approved.

After the war, there was, again, a call to act on a program that all gymnastics training and sports should be combined under a common program leader. This act demonstrated that DTJ had agreed with the provisions that they were willing to accept all Sokol demands to become full members of Sokol. The chief women's instructor of the Worker's Sokol, Patočková, assured me that her life-long dream was to be a member of Sokol, and she was not alone. Soon thereafter, Karel Marek, who represented the DTJ revealed himself as a communist. He, along with František Jeřábek, pursued a program whereby Sokol would cease their pre-Nazi era activities and join in on supporting a total combined sport activity program.

Kavalír had, understandably, a deep desire to devote himself to family duties and to the re-establishment of his medical service. Hřebík was not interested in the unification of the sports problem and was more interested in advancing his own candidacy for the house of parliament as a member of the national socialist party. Vainly, the Sokol board discussed the damage a consolidation of sports would do to Sokol. They tried to convince Hřebík that he could not be a member of parliament and still

carry out his duties as President of Sokol. He was not convinced and decided to pursue his own aims. He had frequent meetings with his political advisors and party members and had no time left to attend Sokol meetings. Because of his actions, the burden of substituting for him at meetings and otherwise carrying out what should have been his responsibilities fell on my shoulders. Especially difficult for me was the time these duties consumed me while my own responsibilities suffered. In the end, I succeeded by an unyielding determination to follow the conditions agreed to by Stalin and Beneš. While some elements of Sokol did not understand what was going on, it was finally made clear in December when the ČOS board agreed to support Sokol independently from the remainder of the sport activities.

In the month prior to the ČOS decision for Sokol to remain independent, a program was implemented throughout the country by presidential decree. The communists applied pressure on the president to force a consolidation of all physical training and sports by issuing another decree. President Beneš invited all concerned individuals to a conference before deciding. I do not remember all who were there, but I do remember František Jerabek and Karel Weigner's successor. Recalling his conversation with Stalin, President Beneš stated to the assembled group that a decree consolidating physical training and sports in the country would not be issued. He also cautioned the group that the only way such a consolidation would take place would be if congress passed such a law. He also said it was clear to him that congress would not take such action. He further suggested that in the interest of peace and cooperation, all further demands for unification should be dropped. After the meeting, I was told that unification would eventually be a way of life; Kavalír also agreed. The statement by Kavalír was made despite the ČOS board action and his position as president of Sokol. They were correct as unification occurred following the putsch in February, 1948.

My workload during the second half of 1945 exceeded my ability to perform satisfactorily in all of my areas of responsibility. In addition to the work connected with the restoration of Sokol and the problems with unification, I had been appointed chairperson of a section of the Department for Sports and Physical Education of Women and Youths of the Ministry of Schools. With

the ending of the war, all previous wartime laws had lost their validity and the premature retirement of state officers had caused a heavy burden on the University.

According to the Protectorate law during the war, Charles University had been required to stop all activities after the demonstrations celebrating the 28th of October and following the death of Jan Opletal, a medical student shot and killed at the demonstrations. To start activities once again, the professors at the Institute for the Education of Professors of Physical Education, in 1945, wanted to allow students to complete their examinations through accelerated courses and work programs. This heavy workload naturally took a lot of my time. My subsequent experiences brought home to me the inroads that communism had made into our daily lives. To assist me in accomplishing my daily work I had been allocated the services of a secretary whose name was Sládek. He came to my office from a concentration camp, where he had been fully schooled in communist doctrine. When I told him how to answer a certain letter one day, it slipped out of him that "we do not want it that way." When I questioned him: "who are we," he realized his error and with a great deal of embarrassment, explained that it is him.

There were several officers from my section of the Ministry who met regularly after work and discussed, amongst themselves, how programs would be handled and resolved. The members of the group were all lower-level employees who, through this back door method, went over the heads of their superiors to implement their own ideas. One day when we were searching for a certain folder which contained the date of a problem on which we were being pressed for an answer by another section office. The folder was found in the secretary's desk. To me, the answer was obvious, he had no intent on coming through me as the chairperson of the office, but instead, was depending on the back door group to implement their own solution. When I complained to the department principal, Dr. Vidimský, about the situation, he stated that he was powerless to act. Because the minister of schools was a communist, I requested a transfer back to a central school.

### **ČOS Restoration**

On May 9, 1945, the Soviet Army entered Prague two days after the city had been liberated and all Germans

cleared from the area. The Soviet Union had not lifted one finger to help the Prague uprising, but instead, the Soviet Army under Radion Malinovsky sat in the Czechoslovak highlands pillaging the private homes and ravaging the women.

My first trip after the war was a visit to the Czechoslovak National Committee. I invited Hřebík and František to go with me, but Hřebík offered us his car with chauffeur that he had secured for himself from a supporter. The residence of the Committee was on Bartolomějská Street, in Old Town where I was welcomed by Albert Pražák with the question: "whom did you send us from Sokol? The person has not contacted me once, who is he? You did not have anyone better?" I did not know who Kavalír had sent, and I know that he spent the Prague uprising period in his apartment wearing a housecoat. Kavalír had also secured for himself an adjutant. Obviously, he considered himself the President of ČOS, but from the time of Tyrš, no President had ever had an adjutant. I doubt that the adjutant had been named to the national committee by Hřebík, because no one on the National Committee knew who he was.

Pražák told me that tomorrow, May 10, President Beneš and his government officials would arrive at Kbely Airport and that I was invited to attend the ceremonies, but he could not furnish transportation. Because Hřebík had a car, Pražák also invited him to attend. A short time later, Pražák returned and requested that we take former minister Arnost Heindrich with us as he had no other transportation. Hřebík put on some airs, but in the end, agreed to the request. Still later, Pražák came once again and asked us to take Vladimir Krajina with us, but this time Hřebík grumbled loudly. The names Heindrich and Krajina were unknown to us. Even though there was enough space on the back seat for three people, Hřebík reluctantly agreed to take Krajina if he would sit on the floor by Heindrich's feet.

The news of Beneš' expected arrival had apparently been announced far and wide, for when we arrived at the airport, there was a large crowd awaiting his arrival. The police announced that only relatives, close personal friends, and members of the government would be admitted to the field. Hřebík introduced us as Beneš' closest friends and used the names of our other passengers, whose names he had only recently heard, to help us enter the area. So, I slowly came to know and under-

stand Antonín Hřebík, who until this time, I only knew as a silent participant in Sokol meetings.

The members of ČOS board, who had lived through the war and were reachable, met for the first time, after the return of Beneš, at Sokol Prague. The first meeting of the ČOS Committee took place on June 30 and July 1, 1945, in an auto club. One week prior to the committee meeting, all three staffs met first separately and then together to hear the news of Sokol activity during the war. There was a discussion about Czechoslovak voluntary service in the West and activity in the Royal British Air Force (RAF). From records and printed circulars of these meetings, it became apparent that the Czechoslovak government abroad knew little about the political changes that had taken place in central and east Europe. From the meetings came plans for the full restoration of Sokol including the South Slavic Sokols, because at that time, only Czechoslovak Sokols remained active. In no country through which the Russian Army passed, had Sokol been restored. From the Sokol Men's Board of Instructors, 16 had either been executed or had perished in concentration camps, as had 27 of 42 district instructors. The election results from the ČOS committee meetings chaired by Josef Truhlář were as follows: President, Antonín Hřebík; Director of Men, Miroslav Kavalír; Director of Women, Marie Provažníková; Educator, Antonia Krejci; and Secretary, Evžen Köpl.

The full restoration of Sokol activities was resisted for a long time by the communists, and they demanded that a combined gymnastics training and sports organization be formed. The federation of proletarian physical education had not been reformed and the communists asked that the same should be true for Sokol. Our entry into the Tyrš House also faced opposition for a long time. Communist Party members, employed by the postal service, discarded Sokol letters and circulars addressed to units and districts, whenever they had access to them. By the end of November, when occupation forces from Russia and America returned home, the fear and mistrust that was undermining justice finally left.

The second ČOS meeting, which took place on 15-16 December 1945, brought to the surface, and made everyone realize that the combination of the physical training and sports programs is not workable. After deciding that Sokol would not combine with anyone, it was decided that full Sokol activity would be reestablished, effective

January 1946. The final report of this meeting from both the instructors and the educators stated that any delay of gymnastics training activity could cause large damage to the entire program.

During 1945, 2,110 units in 42 districts were reactivated, although some, of course, were still not fully active. Some units tried to combine their programs with sports organizations. But in the end, they discovered the sports clubs were not interested in contributing to any Sokol activity and only wanted to get their hands on Sokol facilities and assets.

Occupation of Sokol facilities during the war caused considerable damage. Even film production companies had used the facilities for their own objectives, so all units had to spend time and effort putting things in order. In all districts, schools were reopened with the men's board of instructors supporting 58 instructor's schools. I do not have a count on the number of schools supported by the women instructors, but I do know there were 2,500 graduates from all district instructor schools during that period. In a combined central instructional staff meeting for the year 1946, the following objectives were stated:

1. Establish a program and train 5,000 women graduates of instructional schools.
2. Restore original Sokol units and establish units in the border areas evacuated by the mass removal of Germans from the seized territories. To this end, provide instructor support, training literature, sample training programs, gymnastic apparatus, and mentoring organizations to help the newly re-established units become operational as soon as possible.
3. Train and direct the youngsters raised during the war and help in administering progress examinations. Accept young girls aged 16 and 17 years into instructional training schools. Because girls mature earlier than boys, admit 13-year-old girls into junior classes and admit to full membership those young girls who are qualified instructors. Take all necessary measures to restore the competitive efficiency of the young girls. Expand in width and depth the gymnastics training programs so the participants are better and more broadly trained; develop special instructional examinations and include swimming as a separate event in the basic training program.

Because the participation in international athletic

competitions had been reserved for the sports federations who had refused to support Sokol members, who were not members of sport clubs, the district women's instructional staffs set out to change these rules. Their aims were two-fold: First, they would overwhelm the clubs by providing large numbers of participants; and second, they would ensure that the quality level of the participants would exceed any club-supported entrant.

To achieve the membership goals established by the combined committee, it was determined that the small boys' and girls' classes and the junior classes would have to equal the size of the classes for men and women. Accordingly, the units were directed to regulate the hours of class instruction and the number of instructors even in the smallest units. Additionally, the district instructors were to encourage inter and intra district competition.

This was a bold program. It reflected how the five years of inactivity combined with six months of activity and the pressure exerted by the communists can influence the program's objectives. The program demonstrated how we aspired to remedy the war damages. In addition to the basic program, the Sokol committee established three extraordinary goals:

1. Prepare for the Slet of 1948.
2. Prepare to participate in the Olympic Games in London.
3. Approve a plan submitted by the district instructors that would increase, on a national basis, the construction of new and additional Sokol facilities to accommodate the expanded needs of women's instructional schools.

These stated goals by the central committee indicated the increased awareness at the top levels of authority, regarding the needs of individuals at all levels of organization that must be considered and incorporated into all master plans. It also taught the leaders that cooperation was not only horizontal but also vertical and that events are not only accomplished by an obedience of orders from above, but also by a willingness to cooperate from below.

## VIII. MASS MEETING IN 1947

Sokol President Antonín Hřebík ordered that a mass meeting be held. I was against such a meeting, which we did not have for 20 years, because of the turmoil

and damage caused by the occupation, the war, and the general conditions existing in Europe at that time. We still faced the ferocious efforts of the communist party to assume total control of Sokol, and the deep fear which remained throughout the country as an aftermath of Nazi terror. The effort required to overcome these obstacles, as demonstrated in the December 1945 ČOS meeting, were still beyond the strength of the units and districts to warrant a mass meeting at this time.

The work required for the Slet preparations, and the forthcoming Olympic Games left little energy to prepare for a meeting that would require a review of 20 years of activities. In addition, my forthcoming trip to the US, intended to thank our most important agents abroad, indicated that we really had our hands full.

The reality of the meeting confirmed that my fears about the meeting had not been unwarranted. Many representatives of government were invited to the mass meeting, which was a complete departure from our previous principle that Sokol should be independent of political power. It was doubtful that in the presence of so many government representatives, the attendees would vote for their beliefs instead of what was politically expedient. In the end, the mass meeting was mostly a pompous formality rather than a working convention.

## TOUR OF THE UNITED STATES

After the Munich Accords, the ČOS lost direct contact with units in foreign countries. Prior to 1938, the instructor's board maintained a close personal relationship with the American Sokol Organization and provided travelling instructors when requested. As a rule, the instructor would serve under a two-year contract and travel throughout the US and provide leadership and guidance. After completion of the contract, these instructors remained in the US and became instructors in units or districts. The women's board of instructors also maintained contact with the US female students who graduated from the ČOS instructor's courses and followed the development of Sokol in America through Sokol publications. These contacts were renewed following WWII. We learned of the many areas of help that had been provided by Czech and Slovak descendants to the London government and to the Czechoslovak forces abroad, mostly by American Sokols, during the war. Therefore, the ČOS decided to

send a Sokol delegation to the US to thank the American Sokols for their wartime help and to invite their participation in the forthcoming international Sokol Slet to be held in Prague.

The core of the delegation to the US were ČOS instructors, educators and exhibition teams of men and women. Added to the delegation were a group of volunteer gymnasts who paid their own passage, and agreed to learn a calisthenics composition, and participate in all exhibitions. Even during the preparations for the tour, it became apparent that President Hřebík was not well informed about American Sokols and was not aware of the separate Czech and Slovak organizations in the US.

**EDITORIAL COMMENT.** Antonín Hřebík had been a member of the resistance movement during early World War II German occupation and was imprisoned. When the communist coup occurred in 1948, he and his wife immigrated to Chicago, where he became the co-founder of the Council of Free Czechoslovakia and Sokol in Exile.

I do not know who made up the itinerary for the trip or whether it had been a mutual or unilateral decision. During the first month from mid-June to mid-July, the ČOS delegation visited American Czech units and in the second month we visited American Slovak units. During the first month the Czech units had the time and conditions to schedule public exhibitions. This was not possible for the Slovak units, because we visited the Slovak units from mid-July through mid-August and the weather in the US reaches 100 degrees Fahrenheit with humidity close to 100 percent. Therefore, it was only possible for the Slovaks to schedule two exhibitions. They had also promised the Federation of Workingmen's American Sokol that we would participate in their New York Slet. Unfortunately, we were also scheduled to appear in a Czech exhibition to be held in Omaha on the same date. Negotiations between the American Czech and American Slovak Sokols caused a great deal of tension which, fortunately, I was able to partially resolve when I joined the tour.

Nora Budenová and I were both Professors of Physical Education. We were also members of the qualification commission of Charles University and scheduled to administer state examinations. Even though I was very anxious to renew Sokol relationships in the US, a two-month interruption in my work in preparing for our Slet

seemed unbearable. I, therefore, offered Nora her chance to act as a delegate to the US commission, while I would assume her responsibility for the examinations at the university. I planned to join the tour in Cleveland.

On the eve of the Chicago National Slet, there was a meeting of representatives from both American Sokol groups. The Slovaks declared that if we did not comply with their wishes and provide at least one men's exhibition team for their New York Slet, they would pull out all Slovaks from the Chicago Slet. I was horrified at this news and certainly did not want our well-intentioned visit to be the cause of a breakdown in cooperation between Czechs and Slovaks in the US. I suggested to Hřebík that we offer to fly a men's team to New York and thereby, shorten their absence to only one day. I also suggested we cover the expenses connected with the trip. To his objection to my plan, I reminded him that the units where we appeared spontaneously assumed a portion of the cost of the Sokol tour thereby saving us a considerable amount of money. Hřebík requested I convince the men's leader to send the team, but he told me the men were refusing to fly. After I explained the graveness of the situation and that we would provide insurance for the men, because many had families with small children at home, the team agreed to fly. The Chicago Slet was saved, but the tension between the two Sokol groups in America lasted a long time. I met the men's team leader again when I returned to the US almost two years later as a political refugee.

Both the American Sokol Organization and the Slovak Gymnastics Union Sokol had a difficult time recovering from the effects of WWII, which severely curtailed the activities of all their units. The members who had not been a part of the armed forces were fully occupied in industry, and their gymnastics activity was very limited. Unfortunately, our plan to reactivate the Sokol program faced some problems. We found a large gap between the youth who spoke only English with the leaders, most of whom spoke mostly Czech. In addition, there was a large generation gap of understanding between the members within units. The district Slets, which served as a large encouragement for athletic advancement, were hard to arrange. The Slovaks had a well-equipped camp in Boonton, New Jersey, which is near New York City, but they had very few active athletes. The Czechs in New York had the athletes, but the rental

price for a suitable stadium was exorbitant. I saw a possibility of resolving the situation, which would be helpful to both groups because in New York City, and its vicinity, there were many Czech and Slovak Sokols. I tried to bring the two groups together by visiting the president and the education director of the Slovak Sokols, but they refused my proposal to act in conjunction with the Czech Sokols. They said, "You know how the Czechs were so difficult toward us on your tour." In the same way, the Czech Sokols refused to negotiate with the Slovaks. I continued my visits back and forth for a long time and gradually, they accepted my idea.

Thereafter, we had some beautiful Slets at the Boonton Camp, and these Slets always ended with singing long into the night. How we sang! One evening after a training session, a young man attracted my attention by singing with such enthusiasm that his song was reflected on the lips of his neighbor. The song was, "Bluish Gray she dove, where have you been." When we came to the part, "I lost him on the field," my singer sang Na Pole (on the field) and claimed that it was Italian. He said "that's my country." The singer was attracted to us, even though he was not a Slovak American.

Following one of the Slets at Boonton, the cashiers from both sides disagreed on the division of the profits. For only one hundred dollars, the full cooperation between the Czech and Slovak Sokols ended. They could not understand that the joint Slets were necessary and needed to continue even if we had to pay for the loss of funds that were in dispute. From the former close cooperation between the two groups, there remains, even today, only partial mutual support for national Slets.

### **WINTER SLET GAMES AND THE PUTSCH**

The winter Slet games were a part of an extensive program of the 1948 Slet competitions, which featured competitions in gymnastics and winter sports. The latter included skating, sledding, and especially skiing. The skiing contestants were written about more in Sokol publications than other skiers in trade union papers for skiers. The applications we received for the winter games showed that the Slet was going to include the largest competitions ever held in the Republic. The games occurred during the period 15-22 February 1948, in Slovakia's Tatra mountains.

During these same days, the government was going

through a very critical and dangerous period. While the government and parliament consisted of a democratic majority, our delegates were not able to compel their communist colleagues to accept their resolutions. Moreover, the communists held key positions in many ministries, and they abused their authority by dismissing democrats and replacing them with fellow communists. Gradually, the communists took command of the National Safety staff and the army. The large number of resignations of the democratic members of the government created the need for new elections from which a democratic majority and a powerful victory for the party could be achieved. In this period of raising tensions, and during the main days of the Winter Slet, the communists called two nationwide conventions in Prague for laborers and farmers.

The Slet competitions were opened and closed by two senior ČOS instructors, Miroslav Kavalír and Marie Provazníková. The president of ČOS, Antonín Hřebík, was at that time the chairman of the Armed Forces Committee and took part in the Slet only as a representative with no formal duties at the competitions. Despite the situation, we had the largest competition in the Tatra mountains, and everyone understood that the ČOS president would be in Prague due to his duties as chairman of the Armed Forces. During the competitions, the president appeared. He had an inflamed face and a mildly swollen cheek, but he took part in all Slet events, i.e., both sports and social. On Friday, when the radio reported some very disconcerting news, both of his secretaries went to him and suggested that his place was in Prague in the event of trouble. If there was trouble, he would be available to respond quickly to any request for help. Br. Hřebík assured them that he had telephoned Bratislava, but he did not say why, since the apparent trouble was in Prague. He stated that the situation was in hand, but added that the crisis was of the ordinary type, that the government experiences from time to time.

On Sunday, the ski competition was scheduled to end with the men's 50 km cross-country run and the women's 6 km cross-country run. Both races were to finish at the Hotel Morava, where bleachers had been erected for the audience. From open windows in the hotel, we could hear news being shouted from a street corner of events that were happening in Prague. The news was disturbing, so as soon as the competitions ended, we hurried to the railroad station to secure rapid passage back to Prague.

All of us, that is except for Br. and Sister Hřebík. Later it was learned the reason they did not join us was because they were unable to secure beds for the overnight trip to Prague. I found this reason very strange, because I was given a bed without asking for it and I knew the others also received beds. Any of us would have been willing to give up our bed if Hřebík had asked. The President did not even go to the railroad station but choose to remain in the hotel.

On Monday morning, we arrived in Prague and the members of the board, after changing clothes, hurried to Tyrš House. There we found the place in a turmoil, which one normally associates with a large meeting. The board secretary announced that he found an open letter on his desk, which contained an invitation for ČOS to attend a meeting of the National Front, which was scheduled for Tuesday morning. The National Front was a coalition of all political parties, except communists. How could the National Front compel the Communist Party to abide by the rule of the majority? The secretary did not do anything with the invitation, except inform us of the letter. We quickly decided this would require action by the full board before some decision could be made. We called a board meeting for that evening and left messages in all the places where we thought Hřebík could be, so he would be notified of the meeting. When he did not come to the meeting, we agreed we would meet on Tuesday morning, whether Hřebík attended or not. Once again, we left messages for him that an emergency meeting of the board would take place on Tuesday morning. In the face of this ultimatum, Hřebík attended the meeting.

After reading the letter to the board inviting ČOS to join a coalition with the government, a very serious discussion took place. Br. Blazek expressed his views, which were strongly communistic in tone. When I spoke out against entry into the coalition, Blazek turned directly toward me so he could plainly hear every word I said. I could clearly see he was intent on understanding my views. I was strongly against the invitation and based my views on the teachings of Tyrš who consistently stated that Sokol was totally apolitical and should not allow itself to be drawn into any government. Blazek left the meeting, and it was plain he was keeping someone informed about our discussions.

The voting decision was a heavy burden on everyone. I was sure that however the vote came out, the result

would be detrimental to Sokol. If we voted to refuse the invitation, it could only mean Sokol would eventually be dissolved. Whereas, if we joined the government, it would mean a total disregard of the basic tenets of the Sokol organization, and a loss of our independence. Sokol would cease being the organization that Tyrš established, and we would be going against the sworn oath we took when we joined. To address this important issue, I spoke with several individuals, and we could see our words were causing a strong mental strain on the faces of the board members.

On Wednesday, there was a regular meeting of the ČOS board, where it was announced that President Beneš had accepted the resignations of the remaining democratic ministers, therefore permitting the communist Gottwald to form a new government. Hřebík was extremely excited by the news and now, before the whole board, he turned to the communist Blazek with a question, "What shall I do? I will get out of the party, what shall I do?" Blazek refused to look at him. Hřebík then informed the board that the ČOS deposition had not been delivered to President Beneš because they had not been allowed to see him. The delegation was required to leave the deposition with Chancellor Smutný.

On Thursday morning, I travelled to Rokytnice nad Jizerou (near the Polish border) to complete the preparations for the youth's winter games which were scheduled for the following week. On Saturday, some female members of the board of instructors arrived with the news that on Thursday, a ČOS action committee had been formed. Following the Thursday board meeting, Br. Truhlář entered Tyrš House in an excited state and asked, "What are we going to do? Something must be done." The situation to him was like a large flood sweeping everything before it, while a person looks for a way to swim to the nearest riverbank. So even if several of our board members did not agree with what was happening to Sokol and the country, a way must be found whereby Sokol could regain its former position in the nation.

Following the board meeting, the female members of the board of instructors came to me and wanted to know how I was going to react to the spreading crisis now being broadcast over the radio. My reply was that in my opinion, Sokol's entry into the National Front was the death of the organization founded by Tyrš and Fügner. Perhaps, there was still a possibility that the

democratic minority in the government would seize the power which was rightfully theirs. If they could not do so, then today democracy would perish in Czechoslovakia. The sisters, who were well respected and loved by all, now pleaded with me not to leave them at this low point in their lives. It was very hard for me to answer them for I realized that even though an organization is an inanimate entity, it would be extremely difficult to leave something I had been associated with most of my entire life. In this organization, I had worked with people who had shared my joys and sorrows, who had walked with me through many trials and tribulations, and who I loved for the support and friendship we shared. Because a common belief and love is binding, I promised to stay if I could do so with honor and pride.

For our current readers, it is necessary that I explain what an action committee is and how functions. Such a committee is normally led by either a communist or a social democrat who created the committee so he could achieve his own objective. He normally names to the committee those individuals who share his individual goal or can be easily led. The committee has no legal basis, but despite this, they are formed at all levels of authority. It is hard to explain to logical people how detrimental these committees can be to the rational resolution of a problem. These action committees had influence over the legal entities established to resolve problems, and settle disputes. Their potential danger was their freedom to disrupt the normal operation of the government.

Even the National Front had its own action committees. Following the ČOS entry into the National Front, the new ČOS board attended their meetings and, even though I was a member of the new board, I was never asked to attend a meeting or did I ever attend one. Whenever minutes of national meetings were published, my name was always included with the names of the rest of the members of the board, despite my absence.

On Thursday when the ČOS board met, there was an announcement that two ČOS board action committees would be formed. One was formed by Br. Klinger and the second by Br. Bláho. Apparently, Bláho had an understanding with the communists, that whenever Klinger would call a meeting, he would call a meeting one hour earlier than the Klinger meeting. In this way, Bláho effectively removed Klinger as a threat to communist objections.

The ČOS action committee started its activity by attacking the ČOS leadership. The first two to feel the sting of the committee occurred when they removed Antonín Hřebík as President and replaced Kavalír as Director of Men with a known communist by the name of Penninger. The committee chairman brought with him a ballot document on which my name was marked for removal. When it was announced that I was to be replaced, one of the women instructors announced that the committee better understand that if I was removed as Director of Women, there would not be a Slet. This strong reaction induced the committee to reverse their decision and leave me in my position.

It was hard for me to accept that some of the action committee members were good Sokols yet foolishly believed that through their president's efforts, they could still influence the growth of our youth. Soon they became convinced that their task was impossible, and the new members of the board would be the ones who carried out all the responsibility and influence. The communists on the board quickly made full use of Sokol discipline when they quickly established a task for the ČOS educators to support a single slate of candidates for the next election. The task was unnecessary because when the party supported a candidate who did not win by an honest vote, the new power brokers manipulated the results, so their candidate won the election.

I quickly became disenchanted with the situation and called a special board meeting of those members whom I knew were reliable. I described the situation to them and declared that we could not commit the Sokol organization to serve as a pawn for the communist's agenda. To me there was only one solution and that was to get rid of the action committees. All present agreed with my conclusion, and I then proposed that I submit a proposal at the next full board meeting to cancel all Sokol action committees.

In the company of one of the ČOS secretaries, on the second day after my special meeting, we met with Alexej Čepička, Minister of the Interior. He was very upset with our action and stated in no uncertain terms that our proposal to dissolve the action committees was not final. He threatened to publish a statement in the newspaper that our action was a mistake, and that the action committees would continue to exist. I then told him that if he took such action, I was empowered to tell him that the entire

women's board of instructors would resign. Because it was just before the Slet, the threat worked again. Čepička now took a different approach. He created a commission from the National Front which would oversee the Sokol Organization with the express purpose of searching for any subversive activity.

The action committee did not take any direct role in the operation of the Women's Board of Instructors, except to add some individuals to the board. Even though no one was expelled from the board, we still lost one of our finest, long-time members, Sister Vlasta Svobodová. She resigned her position when she learned that her husband, Svatopluk Svoboda had been expelled from the leadership of men.

## AFTER THE PUTSCH

Slets were like parades where with each passing component, there was improvement in both quality and size. We had just lived through a remarkable ten-year period, not just for us but for the entire world. Europe had passed through the Second World War, and everything connected with it. When the war ended in the spring of 1945 and with it the end of Nazism, not all subjugated nations were liberated. Whenever the Red Armies liberated a country, one dictatorship was replaced by the tenets of another, only this time, it was communistic totalitarianism. The single exception was Czechoslovakia, which held onto a democratic form of government for three years (1945-1947).

Internal and external pressures were brought to bear on our small country and the weak soon accepted the tenets of the new dictatorship. Wherever there were strong characters in positions of authority, they were removed by either violence or through trickery. The three-year period following the war had proved to many of my countrymen that democracy was by far the best form of government, so more and more turned to Sokol as the fulfillment of a democratic ideal. Our hopes for the longest and finest Slet seemed to be possible for the 1948 event, but then came the 1948 obstacles and our hopes were dashed. The overthrow of the government ended democratic development in Czechoslovakia and preparations for the Slet were threatened.

When the change in the government was announced and action committees in Sokol were formed, many Sokol members were so indignant that preparations for

the Slet ceased in many units. Many brothers and sisters requested that the Slet be called off and when their request was not granted, they decided to foil the effort through their absence from the Slet. The Sokol leadership considered the many reasons not to hold a Slet, but then through confidential conversations with those individuals who we could trust, we explained to them the reasons why the Slet should go on. We knew the communists wanted the Slet to be held, but we had other motives for wanting the Slet preparations to continue. Because these motives are not the same for everyone, I want to explain my considerations and reasons for my position. Because for today's young readers it may be hard for them to understand. I would like to introduce some examples that will explain the atmosphere and the methods by which we negotiated our position.

Shortly after the formation of action committees in Sokol, a young man telephoned me with the message that he had a duty to perform with me, which could only be carried out by a series of interviews. He asked me to arrange my schedule and select a time of my own choosing for the interviews. I told him that at this time during Slet's preparations, I had practically no free time because of my full schedule. Generally, I did not arrive at home until midnight or later and I was so tired that the only thing I wanted to do was sleep. He answered that he would be willing to wait, and he would visit me when it was convenient for me. Under the circumstances, I knew it would be absurd to delay the meeting too long, so finally, I invited him to my apartment at a late evening hour after I had finished my day's work.

When he came for the meeting, he explained he was a former typesetter in the printing shop that had printed my book on camping for women and girls. From the book title, he concluded that he would be capable of leading me through a series of interviews. I also learned from him that the new board had appointed him my educator with the objective of making a communist out of me. The board felt that he could convince me to become a party member, and I did have a blank application form lying on my desk. The procedure they were using on me was the same one that was successfully used not long ago on Sister Vlasta Děkanová, a world gymnastics champion. They also knew that on my own, I would not voluntarily enter the party, so they provided an educator to convince me that I should apply for membership.

In the atmosphere of the times, it was hard to refuse the invitation. Patiently, each evening he would be waiting for me to return from work so he could begin the session and generally, he would start by telling me some naive tale. At our first meeting, he told me that the constitution of the Soviet Union begins with the law that throughout the entire state, bread would be free. I objected to that point as I had recently been to the Soviet Union and everywhere I saw long lines of people waiting to buy bread. He answered this was just one of the aftermaths of the war, but I objected to that explanation as a law is a law and if it cannot be followed, it should either be changed or cancelled. In any case, because of my first-hand knowledge of the situation in the Soviet Union, I knew the law was invalid.

In May 1948, Gottwald was elected president following the abdication of Beneš. The election was cheered as a free and unanimous result of a united nation. Following the election, I asked my educator if he had freely voted as I had not. I had been forced to vote under very controlled conditions as four people watched my every movement to conclude if I had voted the straight ticket or had I deviated somehow. In this way, we played a game for the next several months. Usually, after a few minutes, I told him I was tired after a full day's work or too sleepy and thereafter, the interview ended in short order. Things went on like this until June when both of us attended a district Slet in Trnava (a town in Western Slovakia) and we met on the train on the return trip to Prague. My educator started the interview again, but I was not able to hear it any longer. I was obviously upset that he was not able to discern my irritation. He said he was going to ask one last question which was, "What is the difference between Hitler with Nazism and Stalin with Communism?" I answered, "All in all there is no difference; in substance they are the same." Finally, our interviews ended and between us, things were clear.

During WWII, the Slet for us was a symbol of all that we believed in. Even in our greetings to friends, the words we used were, "There is going to be Slet." After the war, when it became clear that our nation was in danger, Sokol became the center of democratic power and the Slet the symbol of our belief in the eventual victory of democracy and Masaryk's humanity. These were the reasons for our large influx of members and the zealous way we prepared for the Slet. These preparations were not

easy for us as individuals or for Sokol as a whole.

I saw young women who thought that no sacrifice was too great if they could participate in the Slet. On gym class evenings, they would leave their small children with the grandparents and then, after class, take the children home. At a preparatory Slet in Slovakia, I saw a young mother use the time periods between graded exercises on the various apparatus to repair her children's stockings. I was at a district instructor's meeting on Slet compositions in the Valašské Meziříčí district (in Eastern Moravia) where the sisters came on skis because their villages were snow-bound. I saw Sokol halls within the cities where gymnastic experts would repeat exercises so that the Slet would exude the love and devotion they were expending in preparing for the Slet. Should all enthusiasm and sacrifices be wasted like water poured into sand? We said "no."

I remember the Sokol soldier's faces when they returned from the frontier in 1938 without having fired a shot. I could read in their eyes the trauma they were experiencing, and I asked myself, should this be repeated? If so, it would leave a far greater scar on the national character. Besides that, it became clear to me that after the putsch, Sokol would not outlive it. During the Slet preparations, which incidentally, were supported by both the Communist Party and the government, we were constantly harassed by the Sokol action committees. If this interference was so strong now, I could not imagine what it would be like once the glitter of the Slet was over. There was no question in my mind that the XI Slet would be the farewell of Sokol for an undetermined period. But no matter how long that time would be, I wanted the memories of this last Slet, before the darkness settled in, to remain on the minds of the witnesses for the rest of their lives. I wanted them to believe in all the ideals we believed in and to understand Sokol, its educational process and its concepts and values. If by chance the waiting period until the next Slet would be longer than the rest of our lives, I wanted the witnesses of this Slet to pass on to their children the tales of the beauty and majesty of this wonderful event.

Now that our motives for holding a Slet were clear in our minds, we decided to continue with the Slet preparations and convince all workers and participants to do likewise. In the end, we were very successful in our efforts, but in the process, we found that the support was

not as joyful or spontaneous as in prior Slets.

**EDITORIAL COMMENT.** The 1948 Slet was important for several reasons. First, the consensus was clear: it was believed that the Slet would be the last for a very long time, due to the power of the Communist Government. Second, the determination of the Sokol members was such that they were willing to make a great effort for the display of a Slet that would not be forgotten during the upcoming dark years. Third, the Slet would reveal the consistent role of Sokol as a democratic organization.

Following the putsch, ČOS stopped being a self-righteous, democratic organization. Out of all its democratically elected leaders, the action committees left only those individuals who were indispensable to the operation of a successful Slet. If those in power wanted to realize success, they knew they had to retreat to a passive role for the present, so that in the future, they could influence the outcome.

As Slet preparations continued, we found many former participating units would not be represented. In previous Slets, elements of the Slavic nations supported the Slets since their origin. After WWII, only one Sokol Federation, ČOS, would participate in the 1948 Slet. Wherever the Red Army passed in their advance from Stalingrad westward, all forms of democracy were dissolved and Sokol was one among those organizations whose existence was forbidden. The American Sokol Organization and the Slovak Gymnastic Union Sokol, the two US Sokols, also withdrew their support because of the putsch and the communist nature of the new Czechoslovak Republic Gottwald government.

## **1948 XI SLET**

### ***Preparations***

The most daring decision to come out of the December 1946 ČOS meeting was to schedule a Slet two and one-half years after the five-year interruption of all gymnastic activity. The decision was really brought about by a very pressing request, not only from Sokols, but from the whole nation. The women's leadership of ČOS soberly weighed the possibility of having a successful Slet after the long period of inactivity. Another consideration was whether there would be the usual growth in the number of participants. Questions that were raised included such things as would we be able to create, print and teach suitable calisthenics for an after-

the-war type Slet. It took the solid will and firm determination by the instructor staff to attempt the effort. In the process of initiating action to accomplish our objective, we discovered many new and young talents among our younger instructors. To develop the small girls' calisthenics, Zdena Teplá, from Brno, coordinated the drill with composer Jan Sehák from the Vinohrady district in Prague. Sehák represented the third generation of his family. His creative musical composition for their Slet calisthenics included an overture in which the girls perceived music that caused them to integrate their movements to the sounds.

A major contribution was made by Stanza Leva who conceived and presented a proposal that entailed a dancing type of calisthenics number to be performed by the Junior girls. The musical accompaniment consisted of national songs which were arranged by Jaroslav Křička. The number was performed in gym-suits in colors that were suggested by the painter Svolinský. It was a cheerful, lively affair that required a high degree of precise movements, which were unsuitable for the younger junior girls. In view of this requirement, only the physically mature junior girls were selected to perform the number.

As originally proposed the number developed by the husband-and-wife team, Matějkov, was disappointing. It was for junior girls, and it originally used white rings as a movement and formation-shaping aid. The number did not appear to be suitable because it did not demonstrate or enhance the maturation period in a young girl's life. The number could have been performed equally well by 50-year-old women, but it said very little about expressions in the character of a maturing young girl, as she passed from a playful childhood to class consciousness and responsible womanhood. The opinions, expressed by mainly members of the youth department, induced the women's leaders to recommend that the Matějkov's adjust the composition in accordance with the wishes expressed by their peers. Boženka Matějková, who at that time was acknowledged as one of our foremost composers of Slet calisthenics and who had behind her the successful dance number performed by 30,000 women at the 1938 X Slet, did not take offense at the request, but humbly promised to try to change the number. Shortly thereafter, she, along with her husband, presented the revised version and the number was performed by a selected group of Junior girls from Prague's Sokol Vinohrady. The

number was performed in its revised form at the XI Slet to thunderous applause, and was accepted with enthusiasm by the Junior girls.

For the women, Boženka Matějková created a composition that was rich with courageous changes of formations which, up to that time were considered impracticable. In one momentous phase she divided the whole field of participants both vertically and horizontally into four major fields with the performers going in varied directions. The result was a surprising and colorful formation. Her changes in the formations culminated after many designs into a chessboard which was created in its entirety.

The leadership of men had a different problem. The junior boys were by far the most difficult group to train and manage. Of all the Slet performers, they were the newest, youngest, and most inexperienced. There was fear that we would be required to present a very basic drill for them. This problem was successfully solved by Br. Brejška, who created a two-part calisthenics number which would be performed simultaneously. The junior boys were divided into two categories: 16 years and older, and younger than 16. The older group performed an advanced calisthenics number while the younger group crawled between the spread-out legs of the older group. The younger group then sat with crossed legs in front of their older partners and with their hands on the shoulders of the younger participants, swayed back and forth while the older group performed their more exacting movements. In accompaniment with the music the entire group of boys whistled the tune. The whistling spread throughout the city, as the boys rehearsed, and soon all Prague knew the tune. From all units there were more than 3,000 juniors who participated in the Slet.

The men's calisthenic number also was a success, thanks to Br. Meduna from Brno, who was not only an outstanding gymnast, but he also composed a fine calisthenics number. His composition excelled as a high-level athletic number, and reflected an aesthetic influence seldom found in men's mass calisthenics.

Equally outstanding were the musical and calisthenics composers who responded to the mood for the new Slet numbers. Ten years was a long time between the X and XI Slets and in that period, the Slet had grown into a symbol and a motto of opposition to the invaders of our country.

In preparing for Slet in the fall of 1946, we sent out

questionnaires to the districts requesting estimates of participants in the 1948 Slet joint exercises. We received responses from 100,000 women. By planning on four days for women's calisthenics, the field would only accommodate 16,000 women at one time, which was a total of 64,000 women. In our leadership meeting we discussed possible solutions. The first proposal was that the participants should individually choose to perform in either the Slet calisthenics or in the dance number. The answer from the units came back with a thunderous — NO! Each participant wanted to perform in the official Slet calisthenics and in the dance which was the most beautiful, joyful, courageous, and revolutionary composition in the Slet. The author of the women's calisthenics, Sister Boženka Malejovcová had a prompt suggestion: "let the younger sisters perform the Slet calisthenics as it would give the best appearance for the composition." Now the older sisters rebelled as if we had pricked a wasp's nest. Not so they said. We will teach all the participants the drill and then just see how it looks. Others said: for the last 50 years I have been a participant in every Slet and now when I am 70 years old, should I just sit in the stands and watch others perform? Boženka, who was already visualizing the exercise performed by all young women, slender and flexible as a young rod, had another solution to the problem. Let us set a limit on participants not by age, but by weight. In our land of dumplings and famous sweets, we foresaw what the reaction would be. Sure enough, the heavier sisters reacted with strong protests, so it was now time to resolve the problem using humor.

At that time, the people's newspaper published a complete page enclosure of cartoons drawn by Ondřej Sekora every Sunday. I acquainted Sekora with our problem and my proposal for a solution. I proposed that we should not eliminate the surplus, over-weight women, but instead have them remove the extra weight. The result was a fable which started with a group of overweight women standing around a piece of gym apparatus and resolutely announcing, "I will exercise." The second picture, which included a window in the background through which could be seen some falling snow, the women were shown exercising. In the third picture were the same women exercising, only now spring rains could be seen through the window. In the fourth picture, the window disclosed flowers and leaves on the trees. In

each picture the women were a little thinner, and in the final picture, the leaves were as red as cherries and the women were as thin as rods.

In addition to a humorous approach, we next went to a strict elimination contest. Perhaps it was because of the disappointment brought about by the putsch, but in the end, only 64,000 women participated in the Slet calisthenics. Of course, on every Slet day additional women did take part in the activities. Because of the examination and fear of elimination, the women increased their efforts in a quest for perfection. When the regular practice areas were not available or over-crowded, the women used whatever room was available. Hallways, meeting rooms, libraries and dressing rooms became regular rehearsal areas. In Kralove Pole, Brno, the brothers complained because they could not find a place to hold their meetings since the women were using every available place. Finally, they agreed to hold their meetings in the local tavern as they had in the golden days before there were Sokol Halls in every ward.

Our problems were easier with the younger ladies because there were boundaries on age and surplus girls were not a headache. Fortunately, we had exactly 48,000 young girls, so on the three Slet youth days, we could use different girls each day. We recognized that both women and girls loved to perform calisthenics. In the onset of Slet preparations, I was very conscious of my responsibility for the Slet's success, so I used every means to prepare myself for the task. I studied calisthenics drills as I rode on the streetcar and one day, I noticed my seat partner also had her drill book in her hands. We smiled at each other and then I noticed across the aisle there was another woman also studying her drill. As the practice advanced and we began to rehearse to music, it no longer became a duty to practice, but it became an exercise of love.

The result of this dedication for perfection in Slet calisthenics was that the women and girls introduced a new level into the Slet. Meduna's men's calisthenic drills were also guided by the same love for calisthenics as the women, but two special numbers had to be cancelled.

The Slet's peak had to be, and was, the dance number performed by 30,000 women. It became the first number ever repeated as an encore at a Slet. Also, the Indian club number was rated highly and was performed by mature women. The dance number was repeated not only for its

artistic and educational value, but mostly because of its pioneering advances in conception and production and its use as a model for future generations of gymnasts. The strongest impression in the dance was its sudden passage from seeming chaos into perfect lines of participants following the voluntary departure of surplus personnel.

#### ***Course of the Slet***

During the Slet, the voice of the people very often manifested the true opinion of the nation. It began early in the Slet when the small girls from the third wave gave the Slet its motto. The girls had just exemplarily performed their calisthenics when they added what was in their hearts. As they finished the drill, they shouted, "Long live President Beneš." The first call was indistinct because of the applause, but the children shouted their message again and again. Then, like a flame that leaped from the field to the stands, within a short period, the entire viewing audience of 250,000 voices joined in and shouted, "Long live President Beneš."

I saw that the shouting was problematic, so I immediately left the leaders' stand and went to the minister's box. I wanted to speak to the members of the government, but before I could, they descended to where I stood and demanded to know how I could allow such a demonstration to happen. I answered that nothing had happened as someone had told the children that President Beneš was on the tribune, and they wanted to greet him. I further added there was nothing wrong with that as Beneš had been awarded the title of President for his lifetime by the government in recognition of his many contributions to the country. "If only he had been present, we would certainly have greeted him," the Minister of Education, Nejedlý instantly added. "Of course, tomorrow he will not be here, but Gottwald will be in attendance." "Tomorrow the children will call nothing," I answered. "I will talk to them before they enter the field and tell them President Beneš is not here so there is no reason to shout out their greetings.

It seemed at first that the seven members of the government who now surrounded me had calmed down and had accepted my explanation, but a little later, I noticed the secret police always appeared wherever I happened to be. One was assigned as a permanent fixture on the instructor's bridge, a second one followed me and a third one sat on a chair outside my bedroom all night long.

Approximately thirty years later, a refugee introduced himself to me as a former member of my personal bodyguard. According to his explanation, the guard was authorized for my protection by the late Mirek Heller, the son of the deputy chairman of ČOS, Br. Karel Heller. The former guard promised to write about the experience for use as an enclosure to my memoirs, but till today, he has not followed through on his promise. It may be that he still has some relatives in Czechoslovakia, and he fears for their safety if he complies. The intervention of my bodyguards was unnecessary. I knew the Slet had to be completed and without me, it would not happen.

Following my explanation about the shouting for Beneš, the government pretended to be placated and I returned to my position on the tribune, but now I was under the watchful eye of the police. Two members of the police politely asked me to accompany them for a short interview at the local police station, which had been placed within the confines of the stadium. Equally politely, I answered that I would go with them, but they would have to wait until I could complete my Sokol responsibilities for that day. The gentlemen agreed to wait. The day's program had, meanwhile, ended and I was now required to attend a ČOS board meeting, which was being held in a room behind the tribune, I asked the president to proclaim the meeting as an "emergency" session so I could propose we cancel the procession of participants scheduled for the following day. The weather had become very chilly with passing showers forecast for the following day. The children were scheduled to move from their place of lodging to an assembly area and then march through the streets of Prague to the stadium. If the rain were to catch them at the assembly area or during the march, I knew that with the cold temperatures thrown in, we would be endangering their health.

President Truhlář agreed with my request, but the communists vehemently protested the proposed cancellation of the procession. In the end, my proposal was accepted. I was then free to join the police and we journeyed to the police station where my interview lasted until one in the morning. František Bláha was with me the entire time of my interview and during the entire period he tried to convince me that all was being done in the interest of Sokol. Throughout the questioning period he constantly assured me that there was no reason for me to be afraid, as nothing was going to happen to me. I

was not afraid because I knew nothing would happen, at least until the end of the Slet. But I also knew the district women leaders were waiting for my return so I could give them their instructions for the following day. The interrogators continued to question me as to why the children had shouted their message for Beneš and in vain. I continued to answer that I did not know because I had not been with them. I was on the instructor's bridge, so how could I know what was happening in the assembly area behind the men's dressing rooms? I suggested they direct the question to some of the instructors and leaders who were there. I knew there were some new instructors with the group who had been appointed to their positions by the action committees so they should know the answer. The interrogators refused to accept my answers, which is why the "little" interview lasted past midnight.

I was then released, so I returned to the room where the women instructors awaited my instructions for the following day's activities. The sisters, naturally, also wanted to know what had happened to me. I told them about the board's resolution to cancel the procession and I asked them to immediately pass the word along about the cancellation. They carried out my instructions and explained to all why the instructions were passed along so late. Apparently, the news of my interview with the police had circulated throughout Prague as well as to all districts.

On the second day of the Slet, the boys were scheduled to perform on the field. The word quickly circulated through the group about the girls shouting out their message. "Did you hear how yesterday the girls called out and we are planning nothing. Today we are going to call out." The instructors tried to subdue their shouting, but here and there, during the rehearsal, there was shouting. There was some calling out in the dressing rooms, and when lining up, but the shouting was mostly over-ridden by the applause after the performance. Moreover, as the group passed through the gates after the performance, the secret police began arresting some of the lead instructors. When I arrived at my post, from where I directed the line-up the next day, a member of the secret police stopped me and with a great deal of hesitation and embarrassment, said he had a message for me. He said he did not know if the message came from the government or the police. In either case it did not matter, as they were the current power masters. It seemed that I was to be

held responsible for any demonstration that originated on the field. He added that it was tearing out his heart to tell me about the message because of how I talk with the children, but his orders are orders, and he was in service and had to obey them.

Similar orders were brought to me each day by František Bláha, who was still trying to create an understanding between Sokol and the new government. Currently, my greatest desire was to stay in my leadership post until the end of the Slet. I sincerely wanted to meet with all instructors and young girls during the Slet, so I could not only say farewell, but also instill in their hearts the message to never forget Sokol, remain loyal to the Sokol ideals, and remember that one day, Sokol would live again in a free country. The only place for such a meeting would be in Masaryk Stadium, but, unfortunately, there was no time in the program. So, in the end, no meeting was held. There never was a moment when all the instructors were free of emergencies and other duties. Suddenly, the communists insisted that I address not only the instructors, but all the small girls and women before they entered the field.

Before each entrance by a group of participants, I was required to tell them from my command position on the instructor bridge, that President Beneš was not present, so there was no reason to greet him. I also added an appeal that they do not spoil their Slet. I said that this event was still a gymnastic performance that was clearly Sokol, and while they were on the Slet field, we were still only brothers, sisters, and youth of Sokol as we were before the putsch. Gradually, some men and junior boys came toward the females, who were listening to me. The men told themselves that what I had said was the truth. The field had no place for demonstrations. The streets were the place for demonstrations and if they wanted to demonstrate, they should take such activity elsewhere. When the small girls passed under the command bridge on their way to the field, they turned their heads to the rear and placed their index finger over their lips as a sign of silence.

It appeared that Gottwald, the government's Prime Minister, and his associates had accepted my explanation and things were now calmed down. However, Alex Čepička, Gottwald's son-in-law and chairman of the so-called Sokol commission of the National Front, was not. This commission was established by the National

Front, without the knowledge or concurrence of Sokol, at the time when Sokol cancelled all their action committees. Its aim was to control and subdue Sokol. Čepička began his task by calling meetings of the commission which included the main Sokol leaders, Prague's police director Hora, the section chief from the ministry of the interior and the ideologist of the Communist Party, Gustav Barel. At the meetings, Čepička explored the possibilities of developing measures that would stop the demonstration from advancing from the junior boys to men and then on to the streets. His particular emphasis for action was to ensure everything was in control for the closing procession of the Slet, which was scheduled as the last big event. On the last Sunday prior to the procession, he wanted articles about old-time Sokol gymnasts, who were still active in Sokol activities, to be published in all newspapers, especially those in Prague.

Čepička telephoned me at least four times requesting I write an article for him. In his most honey-dripping voice he spoke about the articles I had written for Lidovky (Peoples newspapers). He added that if I so desired, he would be sure that any article I wrote would also be published by other newspapers throughout the land. He continued to insist I write an article, but I said to him that he had no conscience if he expected me to write such an article in view of how busy I was with the Slet. I felt I did not have one minute to sit down calmly and think about such an article. He answered by saying he appreciated how busy I was, but if I did not write the article, it would be considered as an example of lack of good will. I told him that if anyone would explain my refusal as a lack of good will, then that individual was a person of evil will. In the end, I promised him I would write an article if I could find the time, but I never did find the time.

Shortly after the Slet, Čepička called another meeting of the Sokol Commission and demanded that the Sokol leadership condemn the Slet's demonstrations. It was clear to everyone what such a condemnation would mean to the Communist Regime. I also knew what would happen to those who offended the system. Truhlář, who was sitting next to me, kept saying he would not serve under such a corruptible system. But when he was challenged by Čepička to express his thoughts, he talked about duty and respect for the head of a nation, for without such values, nothing was possible. Such sentiments were also expressed by those who followed

him. Then Čepička invited me to speak. I thought to myself, for God's sake, what am I going to do. I could not repeat what the others had said and yet, if I said that I agree with the demonstrators, I would leave the meeting in handcuffs. When Čepička, with a broad smile on his face, turned to me and said he would like to hear my opinion, then at that moment there came to me the right answer. "Mr. Minister, you will be surprised" I said. That really gained his attention. "If you are looking for a guilty person responsible for the Slet's demonstrations," I continued, "I will tell you who it is. Hora, Minister of the Police," and others in attendance braced themselves as I continued. "The guilty are the National Secret Police." Hora jumped up and all stiffened waiting for me to continue. Very calmly I added, "And what really happened?" I then repeated the explanation I had told the members of the government following the first call by the small girls. "Nothing happened," I said. "If you had left us alone, I would have told the children on the following day that President Beneš was not in attendance and that would have ended the shouting. Besides, you then had the secret police storm through the dressing rooms, the gymnasts on the field, and the lodgings."

At my statement, Hora jumped up once again. "That is not true," he said. "None of them were there." I then said I personally turned one away from the assembled group of girls. "That was not our man," he said. "He showed me his badge," I responded. "It was false," he said. I added "then you must have some great control in the secret service when people are running around our streets with false badges." At this the police director stopped, and I concluded that "the regulators you sent to encounter our street processions all had false badges." But he denied that there were any false badges. Now Bláha inserted himself into the discussion by declaring, "But you know we delivered the regulators on your own order."

The result of the meeting was a resolution to create a three-person commission who would publish a statement on behalf of the Sokol committee, which condemned the guilty and named all instigators and those who encouraged the demonstration. The members of the commission included František Bláha as the sole Sokol member, Gustav Bareš and a third person, whose name I do not remember. I expected nothing good from the commission, so I called a meeting of trusted members of the ČOS board, which did not include Truhlář or

Bláha. We deliberated the situation trying to decide on a course of action which would be beneficial to Sokol if the commission statement was not acceptable to us. We decided that if such an unsatisfactory statement was accepted by the full board, we would then submit the board of instructor's resignation to the ČOS board.

During all these serious events, which were unknown to Slet participants and the viewing public, the Slet summit was a dance performed by 30,000 women, about which I wrote in previous chapters. Of course, there was also the outstanding drill with Indian clubs performed by the women as the last athletic event of the XI Slet. On the day of the Indian club number, the rain was pouring, and the sisters were wet to the skin, numb from the cold and their blouses clinging to their bodies. Despite these conditions, the women performed their number with all their hearts and souls. Tears were running down their cheeks and their teeth were clenched to prevent loud sobbing. They knew this could be their last Slet and they could not bear losing so much beauty and happiness from their lives. Their efforts were not just physical, it was almost divine worship, and their dedication and shivering transferred to the audience. The quarter million spectators followed their movements with abated breath, soaking in the beauty of the formations and biting their lips with the pain of their departure. There hung the question in the air, "When will we meet again and what will occur between now and then?" There was a silence immediately following the end of the music; then the stands shook with enthusiastic applause. For the first time in the history of Slets, the sisters repeated the number, because the spectators demanded it. This was the last and most powerful part of the Slet.

#### ***The Slet's Scenes and the Harvest***

The program of the 1948 XI Slet was missing a key ingredient, which was an inseparable part of Slet programs since the 1907 V Slet. In each of these Slets, a massive theater-type scene was depicted for its dramatic and patriotic theme. These scenes were expensive to produce and for that reason such a scene was not included in the XI Slet. While the scenes were expensive to produce and often required massive stages, the sale of tickets and Sokol rings would likely have covered all costs.

The Slet scenes silently and inconspicuously portrayed both ideological and educational themes. Sokol

wanted, by using the scene, to remind the nation of its former independence and awaken its longing for its restoration. This objective was done remarkably well in the first two scenes which took place during the time we were still under the control of the Hapsburg government as a part of the Austria-Hungarian empire. The first scene in the 1907 Slet depicted Žižka's victory over King Zigmund at the battle on Mountain Vitkov in 1420 (Žižka was the leader who fought against the Austrian Crusaders). In 1912, a scene represented the situation in Athens after the 490 BC battle at Marathon where the tiny nation of Greece successfully defeated the much larger Persian army. Both scenes, during the time of the Austrian subjugation, made a significant contribution in the re-education of docile, obedient, and non-thinking subjects of the empire into knowledgeable fighters for Czech freedom. An old Austrian folk song included these words: "What was the gain for an industrious citizen who faced certain failure, still lived a long time after the birth of our republic in 1918."

The scene in the first Slet after independence paid tribute to the resistance movement in our nation during WWI and depicted the new nation's efforts in overcoming obstacles in creating political parties. The fifth scene at the IX Slet in 1932 was used to illuminate and celebrate the personality and instruction of Tyrš. It showed the relationship of Sokol's foundation to antiquity, democracy, and patriotism, and additionally, it was used to celebrate the 100th birthday of our founder.

The X Slet in 1938 brought a change to the scene concept. We now had to acknowledge the impact of the large number of observers, the great number of participants and the changes in our society. We treated the scene as a theater production and established the Slet's theme as: "Build and Defend." This new concept required an extraordinary amount of building for the stage and rearranging a large part of the viewing stands to accommodate the modification. In the last 30 years, the athletics portion of the Slet had expanded so much that we had difficulty fitting the scene into the program. Finally, we solved the problem by building a stage in the smaller Masaryk Stadium and scheduling the scene for the late evening hours. In this way, it was separated from the regular scheduled Slet activities.

The attraction of the scenes as a part of the Slet program complimented the large increase in the number

of calisthenic participants. In a way, the changing of formations on the field and in the end the dance of the 30,000 women were, in themselves, wonderful scenes. When we were preparing for the 1948 XI Slet, we realized that something had been missing from our last Slet and now we demanded a suitable scene be included in the 1948 Slet. We had to project a theme that would tie together our folk art, our Czech and Slovak culture, our democratic views, and our physical training programs. I searched for the proper theme and finally it came to me. We could use a harvest theme, which from our agricultural heritage, would tie together the family, the harvest at the end of the growing season and our tributes to the farmer for his leadership and contribution to domestic tranquility.

We did not know that the 1948 Slet would be the last Slet for some time, so we still felt we should pay tribute to our beloved President, Beneš, who had led us from the brink of death. The Slet leadership accepted my idea with great enthusiasm and immediately began preparations for its accomplishment. The poet Jaroslav Seifert promised to write the most beautiful verses of his life. The choreographer of the National Theater wanted to wind a wreath of beautiful girls as a harvest wreath around the President standing on the stage platform, which, incidentally, had to be constructed overnight. We had visions of a colossal flag which would fly down from somewhere high in the sky and somehow connect the entire audience with the stage production. Then the audience and the field participants would dance their way into and through the city until the appearance of the white morning, as described in the Slovak National Anthem.

Interest in the various elements of the theme exceeded the total theme itself. The leader of the dancers praised the splendid material coming from the junior girls through their intellectual and conscious work efforts. We had harvest handkerchiefs printed with wreaths, which would be used to enliven the audience throughout the stands. The enthusiasm for the theme was only exceeded by the enthusiasm shown on the gym floors. By January 1948, gym attendance was closed to all new applicants. In accordance with time honored practices, we refused to allow members who wanted to participate in the Slet without them first passing through all preparatory phases of training.

The joyful mood of Slet preparations continued to

rise until the winter games. The putsch came and everything changed. The flame of the harvest went out as we now lacked a leader to thank for our history and freedom. Interest in the Slet began to drop and some parts of the program had to be scratched. We began to believe that the Slet would not be all we yearned for.

### **Reicin**

“General” Bedřich Reicin was the man through whom the communists issued instructions. His name instilled fear, for through his lips passed the words of Moscow. He was an ordinary soldier who the communists advanced in military grade to his current rank because he did as he was ordered. Later in life, together with Rudolf Slánský, he was placed on trial and, subsequently, executed in 1952. Such was the way the communists rewarded people when they no longer had use for them.

**EDITORIAL COMMENT.** The infamous Slánský Trials represented Stalin's need to control the Czech government, which was seen as too liberal. Of the 14 communist members executed, ten were Jews.

Reicin once called me on the carpet in connection with scheduling of the Harvest theme, which was originally scheduled to take place immediately following the end of the gymnastic portion of the Slet. We originally planned a procession on the day after the Harvest theme as the only event on the program. Of course, our Sokol gymnasts had a role in the theme, but the people in the theme consisted mainly of the various ethnic groups from diverse regions throughout the country. This event was to end the Slet, followed by an army demonstration, because a Slet is not only a Sokol matter, but also a national event. Reicin did not want the Harvest theme to be on the schedule prior to Army Day, but I protested, because the tank and other equipment used on the field would cause damage, so that we could not have the theme a day after Army Day. When he insisted on changing the schedule, I countered with the suggestion that we cancel the theme altogether. He refused to even consider canceling the theme and finally, he allowed the theme to be presented prior to Army Day. He did, however, insist that we would not make any announcement that would infer that the theme was the end of the Slet. I told him I would not tell anyone that such was the case, but I could not be held responsible for what other people would say. With

these final words, we parted.

Because I was not directly involved with the harvest, I took a seat with the audience to watch the event. The new leaders of the harvest that were added after the putsch, sent for me to come onto the command bridge. While they had prepared the groups putting on the theme, they did not know how to bring them onto the field. We had available for use by the leaders a very complete communication system, which included telephones, loudspeakers, and radios, but the new leaders had not taken the time to learn how to use the equipment. I explained what they should do, but they begged me to stay on the bridge as they felt they might need my help later. After the end of the performance, the music played for the participants to leave the field, but they refused to move until I agreed to move to the field between the ranks of the group. At that time, the brothers whom I had called "the army without a leader," even though they had a communist instructor, proceeded to carry me on their shoulders off the field. Now the participants in the theme also wanted to do likewise after the Harvest was over. I could not imagine what I should do as I was still responsible to Reicin. Finally, when I could no longer delay action, I announced over the microphone, "The XI Slet has ended; let live the XII Slet." I then vanished from the bridge.

### ***The Southern Slavs***

**EDITORIAL COMMENT.** The following section regarding Southern Slavs needs to be understood in the context of Josip Broz Tito's Yugoslavia, consisting of six countries: Bosnia & Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro, Slovenia, Serbia, and Croatia. The last three had Sokol clubs. Yugoslavia was a socialist state and served as a buffer between the communist-controlled Warsaw Pact and NATO.

Following the establishment of Sokol in Bohemia and Moravia, clubs were formed in Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia and were known as the Southern Slavs. The Slet days occurred exactly at the time that Tito withdrew from the family of Soviet satellite regimes. At the time of Tito's departure from the Soviet Kommandatura, numerous groups of Southern Slavs were already on their way to Prague to participate in the Slet. This action presented a difficult situation for the Czechoslovak puppet government because its leaders were not allowed to think for themselves, and they had not received instructions from Moscow. The visit had been previously

approved by the government as a symbol of unity and unbreakable strength within the family of soviet satellites. The government had worked out detailed directions for welcoming and paying tribute to the subjects of the communist leader, Tito. Now, what to do?

No one had enough courage to change any of the instructions that were obediently worked out according to the commands from Moscow. So, that was the reason the representatives of the rebellious Tito were welcomed with the same degree of honor as that afforded representatives of states faithful to Moscow. A nation which did not have to wait for commands from Moscow would have an answer in a twinkle. By honoring the Southern Slavs in the same manner as others, the government was in effect expressing their support of the Tito actions. Anywhere the Slavs appeared, they were greeted with the cry, "Good health Tito." The government could not forbid these calls as they were exactly in the spirit of yesterday's commands from Moscow.

The crowning blow came when the leader of the Slavs came out with the statement that his command would do their best for the Southern Slavs. The Slet leadership could not refuse the leader's demand that his group be allowed to participate in the procession. An error was made when they were allowed to appear on the field two days in a row while the Soviet group chose to appear only on one day. The communist leader tried to correct his error by having the soviets also appear on the day of the Harvest, but as luck would have it, rain fell the previous day, so the field was not suitable for gymnastics. The leader of the Soviet gymnasts refused to appear under such conditions.

The next error the leading instructor made occurred because he was obedient to the communists' directions. He had been told that they were to meet all South Slav requests halfway. When the leader of the Southern Slavs requested that he be allowed to address the audience before their appearance, the request was granted. He certainly did not know that the address would be a long speech in defense of Tito's actions against the Soviet Kommandatura. The entire government, including President Gottwald, had to sit through the speech and listen to the applause and praise that the speaker received when the speech was concluded.

### ***Procession***

When the XI Slet parade passed through Prague, the

procession of junior boys, from their sincere belief in Sokol and democracy, sounded an alarm for the political rulers of the land. The rulers realized what could be expected from other members in their processions. The Sokol Commission of the National Front, which had responsibility for the smooth progress of the processions, was attended by Police Director Hota, who offered a solution to the potential problem. He stated that "we have delivered songs and slogans to the city which will be broadcast by loudspeakers from stationary and moving vehicles throughout the parade route." Minister Čepička complimented him for his foresight and a wise solution to a potential problem.

Hower, the voices of the participants in the procession were so strong that they blocked out the loudspeaker sounds and completely silenced the voices of the political leaders. This demonstration in the streets in Prague's Old Town Square demonstrated once again, that Sokol was still the voice for the nation. There we proved that Sokol was still one body in spirit and thought. We also showed how many of us there were and what strength and conviction existed in us. Here marched in our procession the entire nation, from laborer to intellectual, from our small villages to our capitol center. Bohemians, Moravians, Slovaks, and others all contributed to the demonstration. The voice of the people completely overpowered the sounds on the loudspeakers, the efforts of the police, and the cordons of undercover operators. Here the participants of the procession, without a recognized leader, but relying on their own beliefs, thundered out their feelings in a common rallying cry of "Beneš, Beneš, Beneš."

The police, even with their spies and confidants, were powerless to stop the shouting. Where they tried to intervene, the marching unit closed ranks and there was nothing they could do about it. Several times they tried to arrest a few of the Sokols, but the public intervened and prevented the police from gaining entry to the demonstrators.

From the viewing stands in Old Town Square one could see, on the back of Paris Road, a sea of American flags flying above the heads of the marchers. The police hastened to the spot and tried to confiscate the flags. While they succeeded in pulling a few people out of the procession, they could not reach them all and people concealed the flags in their garment sleeves. Once

the marchers passed Gottwald's reviewing stands, the flags reappeared and were waved at the audience in the stands, reserved for foreign visitors. Perhaps as many as 160 brothers and sisters were arrested for their part in the demonstrations, but the police could not stop or arrest all of them. From the demonstrators came a thunderous cry as they entered the Old Town Square, but when they passed the reviewing stands, all bowed their heads with tears of shame and humiliation in many of the marchers' eyes. Most flags were carried high and proudly on the shoulders of the marchers, who only saluted when they passed the tomb of the unknown soldier.

Once the marchers had passed the viewing stands in silence and bowed heads, they raised their voices and from the windows of the buildings, and from cornices, roofs and wherever else people were viewing the procession, there, once again, came a thunderous cry flooding the square shouting, "Beneš! Beneš! Beneš!"

This was not merely a demonstration; it was a cry of defiance and an oath from the people expressing their true feelings. This was a voice from the XI Slet that spoke for all enslaved nations and peoples of the world. In the name of President Beněš, the people were expressing their belief in the ideals which this student of Masaryk taught and demonstrated through his fight for liberty, democracy, and a final victory for truth. It was in this belief in ideals and the determination to fight to achieve these goals again that was the legacy of the XI Slet.

## THE OLYMPIC GAMES IN LONDON

The ČOS committee meeting held in December 1945 ratified the proposals from both men's and women's instructor staffs that Sokol would send teams to the 1948 Olympic Games in London. This decision was equally as courageous as the decision to hold the XI Slet in 1948 after five years of interrupted activity.

We knew that, during the war, some of our gymnasts had found their way onto gym floors in active gymnastic units, in sports clubs and in private schools, wherever it could be done. But we also knew that it was only a small fragment of the large number of former gymnasts, because the threat of betrayal for conducting illegal activity in the German Protectorate was a very real danger. The support facilities for the conduct of gymnastic activities were in a very neglected condition. Sokol buildings in some areas had been damaged by the war,

and some of the apparatus and other supporting equipment was damaged or stolen, and there was a great lack of material available to remedy the damage or replace the missing items. The most serious situation existed in the men's instructional staff where many of the best leaders at all levels (unit, district and the ČOS staff), were either dead or otherwise unable to continue their duties. This situation made the leadership and instructional staff more determined than ever to work and achieve an honorable showing in the scheduled competitions.

The management of gymnastic competitions at the Olympic Games was the responsibility of the International Gymnastic Federation, also known as the Fédération Internationale de Gymnastique. This Federation worked under the supervision of the Olympic Committee and was required to respect the athletic leadership provided by the Olympic Committee (O.C.). Because the O.C. had the final decision regarding which athletic disciplines would be included in the Olympic Games, Sokol carried little weight in requesting events that would benefit the Sokol style of competition.

Since the regular cycle of the Olympic Games was interrupted by WWII, the last games occurred in Berlin in 1936. Thus, for 12 years there were no games, although they had originally been scheduled for Japan in 1940. Of course, in 1940, Japan was deeply involved in war in East Asia, so the competition was cancelled. I had a small keepsake from the last meeting of the International Olympic Committee held during the 1938 X Slet in Prague where the Japanese delegates handed out replicas of the Olympic medals, they hoped to award in 1940. The keepsake medal showed half of the sun over the ocean. This keepsake remained on my writing table in my apartment and was confiscated after my final departure from Czechoslovakia. In 1944 the world was involved in a global war, so no games were considered.

The war also interrupted friendships which had developed between representatives of the various Olympic Committee members. It was known that Adam Zamoyski, chairman of the International Gymnastic Federation died during the war. I also knew that Jadwiga Zamoyska, a director on the committee, was now living in a village near Zakapone, Poland, in the Tatra Mountain range, near Slovakia, and was earning her livelihood by knitting sweaters.

The Federation Deputy chairman, Count Goblet

D'Alviella from Brussels, called a meeting of the committee members, who were still alive, in Geneva at Easter time in 1946. Czechoslovakia still had all three of their pre-war delegates living. The committee members included treasurer Vladimír Miller and deputy chairs of the men's and women's committees, Br. Klinger, and Sister Provazníková. There seemed to be no problems regarding our attendance. We had to travel through Austria, which was still occupied by the combined allied armies, to reach Switzerland. A simple solution to our travel problem would be to fly, but Miller would not, under any circumstances, consent to fly because he was afraid. This meant we had to obtain transit visas from the Americans, the Soviets and the British, and a visitor's visa for Switzerland. With four visas to obtain, a short time in which to obtain them and because I was the only one to speak a little English, I was designated to lead all negotiations for their procurement.

I started at the American consulate, which I considered would be the easiest people to deal with. How wrong I was! The American occupation office at the time was represented by a young snob who behaved toward all applicants as though they were poor relatives. When I requested a speedy action to my request, he categorically refused and stated the action would be completed after Easter. I explained to him the Easter time would be too late as the international meeting would then be over. But he refused to change the availability date for the visa and refused to speak further with me. Fortunately, we had a promise from Jan Masaryk (the former president's son) that if we ran into difficulty about our visas or travel tickets, we should call his secretary, who would help us. I turned to his secretary for the promised assistance, who, in turn, applied the necessary pressure on the chairman of the American occupation forces for his help. Once again, I was sent to the ugly American who was furious that such a small nation would dare question what action he should take. However, he was required to comply with his instructions, so he said the visas would be available at the Embassy on the day of our departure. In vain, I tried to explain to him the importance of getting the additional three visas, which we could not do on a Saturday, but he refused to change his position. In the end, we were able to talk Miller into flying. Once again, I turned to Masaryk's secretary for help in obtaining airplane tickets as there were now only one or two days before our sched-

uled departure. When we received our tickets, it was my third meeting with the ugly American, because I needed to get our passports as we still had to secure our visa for entry into Geneva.

The first meeting of the International Athletic Federation was a very sad occasion. Not only was the chairman Count Zamyski missing, but so were Directress Jadwiga Zamoyska and the representatives of all Slavic countries. Their absence was because their countries fell within the zone of the Soviet Army, which extended from Stalingrad to Berlin. Apparently, through arrangements made at Yalta, wherever the red army passed, they created physical culture elements based on the Soviet model to the exclusion of all other athletic organizations, including Sokol. These Soviet model organizations were under State supervision and had no connection with the international organization.

Elected officials were Goblet d'Avella (from Brussels), Chairman of the International Gymnastics Federation; Vladimír Miller, Treasurer; Hugenia (French-Swiss), Director of Men; and Marie Provazníková, Director of Women. We were individuals entrusted with the task of preparing the gymnastic competitions for the 1948 London Olympic Games in August. In addition to preparing for the XI Slet, this task was not only a considerable workload for me, but also for the entire ČOS board. We certainly understood the implication of these tasks which, on an international level, meant that individuals not only represented themselves, but they also recognized that they represented their organizations and countries. The ČOS Board of Women immediately created an Olympic commission and elected those sisters with most experience at the international level, and who also understood champion-level gymnastics.

In all international federations where membership was open only to women, Sokol had active gymnasts, instructors, judges, and leaders represented. Sokol women always tried to introduce items that were in harmony with the Tyrš concepts of training, and this included introducing these concepts into international gymnastics. Before World War II we were very successful. However, after WWII, when Czechoslovakia remained as the only active Slavic nation, even though our activity had been stopped for almost ten years, we realized we had not progressed, whereas other countries had.

I called a meeting of the Technical Commission of

women to be held in Amsterdam. Germany was the only country not represented at the meeting, as they were not accepted by the FIG because of their war crimes. According to my memory and other sources accessible to me, it looked as though the Olympic Games held in Berlin in 1936 was the first time Germany was represented at an Olympic event. Until 1934 Germany was not a member of FIG, but I do not know why.

At the 1934 international athletic competitions in Budapest, Germany applied for FIG membership and was accepted. They were immediately awarded the responsibility for the Olympic Games to be held in Berlin in 1936.

In some gymnastic federations, women's training developed in ways very similar to those that were developed in Sokol. The emphasis in women's gymnastics was on the feminine form featuring graceful movements such as those in calisthenics drills which were carried over to movements on the apparatus. Judging in competitions put a greater weight on continuity of movements, rather than solely on difficulty. Along with the other female representatives from France, Sweden and especially Holland, we understood these concepts. Personally, I made friends, and later the entire ČOS board made friends, with Holland's delegate, Mrs. Van der Most. We invited her on several occasions to visit us in our country and arranged gymnastic schools for calisthenics and apparatus. She helped train our team. At one of these schools, we arranged a special evening at the Vinohrady Theater, where Van der Most performed a solo followed by a few teams who performed on the apparatus.

At that time, our procedure was to divide gymnasts into groups based on their age and their proficiency or skill on the various apparatus. In general, we had four skill levels and as individuals improved in proficiency on the apparatus, they would progress to the next higher skill level. By the beginning of February, we knew the skill level of the individual gymnasts well. At the district level, they were placed in suitable levels for participation in additional trials and the best of level IV were moved to level V. These level V individuals were, once again, tested and the best were chosen to compete at two provisional centers until finally there remained only the twelve best women gymnasts. These twelve then prepared themselves through their Olympic training at Tyrš House for the London Games. The final training was accomplished on the state fields and at Tyrš House. The men

went through similar training and prepared themselves for both the Slet and the Olympic Games.

The end of the Slet also marked the end of my guaranteed personal safety. But the Olympic Games presented me with the possibility to escape from the communists. They could not easily deny me a visa for the trip to the games, because I was Sokol's Director of Women and a member of the International Gymnastics Federation. If I were not to appear in London, the publicity would certainly refute any claims by the current Communist government that it was a government brought about by the will of the people. I was relying on this premise, and I had a valid passport for the rest of the year. So, in May, I sent it to the Ministry of Interior to be approved for permission to exit the country. When the passport was not returned, I sent my secretary, first once a week, then every other day, and finally, every day to obtain it. I had already purchased my ticket to London, but I had neither my passport nor my exit visa. Finally, my secretary received it late on the day before my departure date. I immediately telephoned the Visa Department of the British Consulate, and received the reply they were not closed and had received an order to remain open until they received my request so that they could issue me a visitor's visa. I do not know who interceded for me with the British Consul, but I had nothing to do with it. The communist's game was to withhold the exit visa until it was too late to appear at the Visa department, so then they could announce to the world that I could not fly to the Olympic Games because I did not have the visa. Fortunately, for me, their scheme failed.

Close to the evening before my departure for England, Čepička called a meeting of the so-called "Sokol Commission of the National Front" and called me at least three times to assure himself that I would attend the meeting. I promised him I would attend, and I had every intention of doing so, as I had always attended the meetings in the past. On the evening of the meeting, I journeyed to Tyrš House and while there, I was informed that one of our competitors, who was a member of the Czechoslovak track and field team, was unable to secure an exit visa from the offices in Brno. I called Brno since there was a new law uniting gymnastics to the highest official for all sports. I waited two hours for the telephone connection to Brno; such delays were normal. Once the call was completed and after so much of the evening

had passed, I told myself that the meeting was probably over, and it would be useless to attend at such a late hour. Furthermore, I still had to pack for my trip, so I decided to go home. In the morning, I stopped at the office of one of the meeting participants, who told me that I had the good sense of not attending. Čepička in the meeting had accused me as being the instigator of the demonstrations at the Slet and declared that I was the number one enemy of the communist socialist order.

At the airport I discovered that Klinger was to accompany me on my flight to London. We had resolved our differences and we were no longer angry with each other. When we were returning at Easter time in 1946 from a meeting in Geneva, Klinger had offered to bury the war ax between us. I answered that I had nothing to bury because I had nothing against him. I told him that between us was his attacks against me and my efforts to defend myself. Now that he was no longer President of ČOS, he could not harm me, so I had no reason to defend myself.

When we arrived in London, the visa officer asked me how long I intended to stay in England. During the questioning period, I noticed that Klinger stood right behind me so he could hear my answer. I answered that I would stay a few days after completion of the Olympic Games, but I did not know exactly how long. I had to be in London before the team's arrival so I could complete any last-minute arrangements and assure myself that all teams strictly adhered to all competition rules and regulations. While I had a definite function to perform in preparing for the Olympic Games, I had no idea why Klinger was there and why he positioned himself at my side. On one evening, however, he left to do some private business and an English delegate and the secretary of the women's Technical Commission, a Miss Taylor, asked me if I intended to return home. When I said no, she gave me a piece of paper which contained her address and the telephone number of an American, Dr. Brown who was offering me employment at Panzer College in New Jersey where she was president.

On our second day in England, I went with Klinger to pay respects to the CSR ambassador, whose name I no longer remember. He was a very pleasant man and a Sokol who at first sight inspired my confidence. When we arrived, he was busy with a visitor, so we had to wait in an outer office. Klinger started a conversation with an

official and I with a female officer. She too was a Sokol member and the first thing she asked was if I intended to return home. I shook my head “no,” and she said, “For God’s sake. Do not say it here.” But it was already out, and we understood each other. The Ambassador received us very graciously with a smile and in a brotherly manner. Klinger gushed out that we wanted him to be conscious of the fact that we did not want to meet any displaced persons. The Ambassador gave an order to the doorman at the hotel that no such individuals were to be admitted. After this, the attitude between us changed because the Ambassador had not expected such a position from us. Otherwise, the visit was socially acceptable. I later found out that the Ambassador remained in office for an additional period and then resigned. I suppose he wanted more time to prepare himself for exile.

After our experiences at the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin, I recommended we conduct a short judging course immediately before the start of competitions. Our Czechoslovak team promised to provide material for use by students at this course. It was not exactly to our team’s benefit to show in advance the weak points and priority of effort in judging a gymnastics movement. We did feel, however, that we should make this information known to all so the competitors could be evaluated fairly, as I had previously agreed. At the judging course, one of our competitors performed a vault over the horse which was practically faultless in its execution. The Hungarian judge, who I knew as one of the foremost qualified gymnasts through both experience and education, rated the jump as a seven. When I asked why she deducted three points, she had no idea how to justify it. We saw that what we had considered to be bad judging was simply a case of ignorance in judging. This ignorance existed in both estimating the difficulty of a movement and then in evaluating the performance of the individual element of the movement.

Our team arrived in London later under the leadership of Professor Kněnickou, a militant communist. He had been placed in charge of both Czechoslovak competitors and judges. I did not protest this assignment because at the last meeting of ČOS, I had resigned my position. The new leader had not been elected to his position, but appointed and he could not change any of the members of the team because their applications were processed during my tenure. The team members and

judges remained an intact Sokol group with one exception, Nora Budenová, the leader who trained the team for two years, was replaced by Vlasta Děkanová. Although Vlasta won the world championship of the FIG in Prague in 1938, she was a graduate of the old school, having been trained by men instructors and competitors and had not progressed through the development phases of feminine gymnastic movements and skills for women. She had enormous strength and courage, but her apparatus movements lacked the smooth harmony and internal rhythm we had been emphasizing since WWI. She had not played a leadership role in preparing the competitors for the London Olympics but was content to be an assistant to the leader.

How she suddenly became the leader of the team was revealed to us when she announced, “So I am there also.” We asked, “where?” “In the party,” she replied. “They gave me an application on the table.” She had become a communist not through conviction or career enhancement, for she knew her fame had long since passed away. Rather she accepted blind obedience to the governing authority, but the communists saw that in her application they would reap a large propaganda victory and, naturally, they tried to profit from it. Through her membership they could claim their ranks included the world’s former champion of women’s gymnastics, and they intended to make the most of the situation.

The culmination of the situation came when the party, approximately three weeks before our own elimination competition, asked me to make Vlasta Děkanová a member of the 12-woman group we were preparing for the Olympics. At that time, we had 12 women in training, which included two substitutes in reserve in case someone would become sick or injured. They wanted me to appoint her as a member of the team and discard one of the women who had been training for the event for two and a half years. I explained to them that her performance would hurt the team in every event, because she was not as qualified or proficient as the weakest substitute, noting that there were new ways in judging women’s gymnastics. Moreover, I said her participation in the team’s drill with clubs would result in a serious flaw in the overall appearance of the routine. Nothing I said seemed to convince them to change their request, so I had to use my strongest weapon. I declared that as chairwoman of the Technical Commission of FIG, I

would not permit any change in the applications. The team was going to compete in the same composition in which had been reported by ČOS and accepted by the Technical Commission. They then said they would withdraw their demand if I would appoint her leader (coach) of the CSR team. I thought the request was not only absurd, but also a very unjust demand. The leader who had worked hard with the group was expected to step down now at a time when the fruits of her labor were ready for picking, all because Vlasta had become a member of the Communist Party. In the interest of the whole world Olympic Organization and in the interest of ČOS, I needed the best judges I could obtain for the competitions and one of the best was Nora Budenová. I told her that she had done a fine job preparing the team and nothing more could be done to improve it. I then changed my position by appointing Zdenek Nejedlý the team leader, which released Nora Budenová to function as a judge.

One of our highest hopes for winning a team medal was Zdenka Veřmiřovská from Kopřivnice, a town in Eastern Moravia. She was a lot younger than Děkanová, but she had worked through the complete development phases of training which included the most advanced phases of women's gymnastics. She not only excelled on all the apparatus events, but also in the calisthenic number with clubs, which we needed for the team exhibition. The compulsory exercise on the rings ended with a somersault in an arched position. This exercise was the most difficult of all compulsory pieces and Veřmiřovská performed the piece perfectly. Her somersault was always performed flawlessly as she glided through the air in a perfect position and invariably landed on the mat in a solid stationary position. Her grade for the routine was a perfect 10. At the competition when Veřmiřovská performed her exercise, everyone paused at what they were doing so they could watch her performance. Nejedlý was standing next to the mat at the landing zone for the somersault and as Veřmiřovská was completing her rotation and headed for a perfectly vertical landing, Děkanová extended her hand as we would do at practice with a novice to prevent a fall. In the process of rotating her body and extending her arms as a counterbalance for her body, Veřmiřovská touched Děkanová's hand. There was an immediate four-point deduction for the infraction of the rule that a coach cannot touch a gymnast during her routine. The loss of four points caused Veřmiřovská to

receive the lowest score of the team.

The loss of those four points endangered the overall team standing so that by the end of the apparatus competition, the Hungarian team had a higher point total than the Czechoslovak team. Everything then depended on the final phase of the competition which was the entire team performing with implements.

The Czechoslovak team now faced the final phase of competition without the services of Eliška Misáková who had been one of our greatest hopes for a victory. Immediately upon arrival in London, Eliška indicated that she had a headache and some stiffness in her neck. Nora Budenová, who had some similar experiences with her family, and trained this team, instantly suggested there might be a chance of polio. At that time, in Prague, there was a polio epidemic and a medical cure for the disease did not yet exist. On the last day before departure from Prague, the team had been given a free day for relaxation and had received strict orders not to swim in the Vltava River. Eliška had disobeyed the order and had gone swimming with her fiancé in the Vltava. Nora was right in her fear, as the doctor did, indeed, discover polio. Eliška was immediately placed in an iron lung, but her condition was quickly worsening. When the team was preparing for their last number, a messenger arrived from the hospital with the message that Eliška was sinking fast. The note added that if her sister, Miloslava, also a team member, wanted to see her one last time, she should go to the hospital immediately. I could not release Miloslava as the team was in formation for their entrance and such an announcement would have ruined the unity of the team. I did tell Nora Budenová, who played the accompaniment to the exercise on the piano. If Nora had not known the composition by heart, I know she would not have been able to read the music. During the entire exercise, tears flowed from her eyes and down her cheeks. I doubt if she could see the team perform, much less see the music. The team performed perfectly and received a perfect 10 score. At the festive ceremony, celebrating the victors, the Czechoslovak team entered the arena wearing mourning ribbons and carrying their flag enveloped in a black veil.

The next day was a Sunday, and the Olympic flame was extinguished. A sister, who I cannot name, announced to me that the leaders of the Czechoslovak expedition had resolved that the team would stay in London for the

cremation of Sister Eliška. She further stated that she had been designated to officially bid farewell to Eliška Misáková on behalf of everyone. I assured her that she was not going to speak because Eliška had died in the middle of competition under the Czechoslovak flag in the highest competition in the world and she deserved to have the highest official available speak in her behalf. Since I was the highest official present, I would speak on behalf of the country and the team.

Shortly before the announcement of the Olympic winners, I received a report from Klinger that I should depart London on Monday and that he had my airplane tickets. I refused to accept the message. On Sunday, at the closing ceremony of the Olympic Games, a member of the Czechoslovak delegation asked me if I knew that I was to return home with Klinger. I told him that Klinger had left me some sort of message, but I refused to accept it. "But you must leave with Klinger," he said. My response was "No!" He then asked, "Does it mean that you do not want to depart?" I told him that I want to depart, but not when somebody orders me. After the cremation, I announced to the leader of the Czechoslovak expedition, František Jeřábek, that I would not be flying home with the team.

It was now clear to me that the government had made Klinger personally responsible for my return to CSR. That was why he wanted to avoid the unpleasant task of being the bearer of the news of my refusal to return and had transferred this task to someone else. In the end it was František Jerabek who had to make the report. There were also other members of the team who did not want to return, but I reminded them that their real leader, Nora Budenová, was personally responsible for their return and she had two small children back in CSR.

Many little skirmishes occurred in carrying out the function of leading an expedition. For example, Klinger wanted me to give our voting proxy at the election meeting for FIG membership to the benefit of the Bulgarians so that they would remain in Slavic hands. When I asked him when they became Slavs, he was puzzled and finally replied that they are our friends. I explained to him that FIG is a democratic organization whose functions are not for sale.

To prepare myself for a worst-case scenario, prior to the departure of the team, I moved from my hotel to the residence of the president of the London Sokol. From

him I learned that London Sokol did not receive an invitation to the farewell reception for our expedition to be held at the CSR embassy. When I asked the ambassador why Sokol London had not been invited, he told me that the guest list was obtained from the leadership of the farewell committee. He then accommodated my request by inviting the board of Sokol London to the reception. I wanted them to be at the reception to assure myself that they would receive the gym equipment that was used in the competition. It was the custom of ČOS that whenever the international competitions were held in a location where there was a Sokol unit, the apparatus brought by the team would remain with the local unit. The Czechoslovak apparatus was world famous. All nations wanted to use our equipment when they competed, for such was the reputation of the Adamov's company products. Fortunately, most of the apparatus remained in London under the administration of Sokol President Daněk.

Before the expedition left London, I called a special meeting of the Technical Commission of FIG and announced that I could not be a candidate at the next election as I was not returning to CSR. As my personal choice, I recommended that Nora Budenová be elected in my place. She was then elected unanimously and without any debate. Everyone knew her and appreciated her knowledge and special education.

On Wednesday, after the team's departure, I visited Ladislav Feierbend, an economist who was a member of the CSR government in exile during WWII, and in 1938 and 1939 he was Minister of Agriculture. His efforts on my behalf were invaluable, as I endeavored to obtain an American immigration visa. I maintained friendly contacts with him and his wife, Hanička, and even brought her a small trinket from her mother when I flew to London for the Olympic Games. I turned to him with full confidence because I had no idea how to get from London to America to work with Dr. Brown. At that time the US still had strict quotas on emigration visas. Also, both Germany and Italy had so many refugees clamoring for visas to America, that those who submitted requests in August, as I did, were told to expect a several-year delay.

Feierbend welcomed me with open arms and stated that they had been expecting me since lunch time. Since that time, they were besieged by reporters wanting news

about my refusal to return to my country. Feierbend then took me to the news editor, Josef Josten, in whose apartment I had my first news conference. I was now a political refugee. On the following day my story was in all the world's newspapers revealing that the revolution in Czechoslovakia was not the will of the people, but rather a putsch carried out by the communists.

## FADING AWAY

**EDITORIAL COMMENT.** This section was titled "Doznívání," a Czech term which means "fading" or "dying."

The author was indicating that Sokol in Czechoslovakia was ending in the late 1940s when communists infiltrated the organization, as the country becoming a Soviet puppet state. Sokol did not exist in Czechoslovakia for four decades until its reorganization in 1990.

Once the Slet was over, nothing remained to prevent the party or the government from showing its power and control. The arrest of Sokol leaders had started once the small boys completed their calisthenics number and the instructors had been pulled from the ranks. There were also arrests of individuals who were not present at the Slet, but were charged for instigating the demonstrations. The head instructor from Sokol Karlin was so accused, even though she had cautioned the women not to make a sound during the procession because she feared for my safety. The arrests were so extensive that finally, eyes began to open for those who still thought Sokol could live under a communist dictatorship. Today it may be unbelievable to some that we knew very little about the inner workings of communism. During the time of the war, the Soviet Union was a closed country with the well-known iron curtain which, not only prevented us from knowing what went on in that country, but also kept them from knowing what went on in the West.

I first fully learned about life under communism when I came to London for the Olympic Games and Dr. Vldimský recommended I read a book titled, *I Chose Freedom*. I immediately purchased the book, which, incidentally, was the first English book I read. Those of us who lived through the 20 years of the Czechoslovak Democratic Republic could not believe that the nation was doomed to repeat the terrorism under communism that we had experienced under Hitler. We honestly believed that WWII was not completely over because, when America entered the war, President Roosevelt

stated that the war would not be finished until all dictatorships and totalitarianism in Europe were ended. On this belief, we thought there would be a meeting of the East and West armies somewhere along the Labe, if not now, then sometime later. In the years that followed my exile, I secured Czechoslovak democratic textbooks from the period of our republic that had been microfilmed and held on file at the US Library of Congress. I wanted to make sure that after the eventual defeat of communism, the Czechoslovak schools could immediately obtain these democratic textbooks.

I learned what occurred in Prague after my departure from members of our team and later from refugees who reached London. Two days before I left Prague, we had a ČOS board meeting where the majority of those present submitted their resignations. It had been resolved at the meeting to delay writing up the minutes of the meeting until August. When the team arrived in London, I learned that the resignations had not been accepted. Who did not accept the resignations I do not know, because only the ČOS committee itself was authorized to make such a decision.

Before the Slet, the Board had operated under valid rules which had not been abolished. Beside the message of President Beneš, which was reported to me by Chancellor Smutný, all athletic and sport federations now were required to join Sokol. The communists were determined that the Slet was to proceed as scheduled. The individual board members who had resigned plus those Sokol members who had not been expelled by the putsch in February simply stopped functioning; they did not attend meetings or perform the duties of their office.

During this period, the districts were not silent. I can remember them sending protest letters to the government with Moravia-Silesia and Pilsen districts leading the way. Their protest was against the unauthorized arrests and against the confiscating of Sokol property. These letters were also sent to the ČOS board which had resigned, but of course, their resignations had not been accepted. The protest letters were processed by leaders installed by the action committee in February, and they had no effect on the arrests which continued.

I was destined to remain in London longer than I expected. Dr. Feierbend introduced me to an individual from the American consulate and gave me valuable information concerning my request for a non-quota

visa. I was qualified for such a visa because I was moving from Charles University in Prague to another institution of higher learning, Panzer College in the US. A contract with Panzer College was already prepared for me by Dr. Margaret Brown. I thought the visa would be an easy item to obtain because of all the preparations that had been made, so I waited with full confidence for early success. While waiting, I made friends with a woman who was a leader of the London unit, where they re-instituted exercise classes for women. I continued to wait for my visa. However, instead of a visa, I received a message from the American Consulate that my request lacked one important document. At that time, my English was very limited, consisting mostly of technical and apparatus terms so I really did not understand what was needed. I presented more documents and affidavits than was normally required from all applicants, but it was still not what was required.

I guessed that what they wanted was some type of affidavit from American Sokol, so I wrote to the vice-president Blanche Čihák, who sent it to me. The consul praised the affidavit, but said it was not what they wanted. It took me a long time until I understood that what they required was confirmation that I had taught during the last two years prior to my leaving CSR. I had with me only a certificate from Charles University stating that I had taught physical education there in 1945. The American Consul wanted confirmation that I had functioned as a teacher until 1948. The consul could not understand why I could not receive such a confirmation. "Why can't you receive it if you taught there in 1947-48?" he said. "Write to the Czechoslovak offices and have them send such a document." It took a while, but I finally made him understand that a dictatorship does not work like a democracy. Their laws are not the same and if they do not want to send such a document, they will not. He then added that without this document, he would be unable to give me a visa.

I went again to the advisor that Dr. Feierbend had introduced me to, but he told me there was nothing he could do. All further decisions on my case would be made by the consul. I was at my wits end. I was in England, and had the right to political asylum, but I had no work. When I went to the consulate again, I saw my advisor coming from his office. He did not promise me anything, but he explained that he had gone to the consul and described the situation in CSR to him. He also

told the consul that he had information from a former member of the Czechoslovak government in exile that, in his opinion, I was a person who was trustworthy and deserved consideration.

The consul then invited me into his office and asked if there was someone in England who could certify that I taught at the University until I left Czechoslovakia. "That I have," I replied. There was a former minister of education, Jaroslav Stránský, who I knew personally. The consul told me to have him certify in writing to him, and on his certification, he would complete action on my visa. When I went to Stránský with my petition, he wondered how such a document would be adequate. He said he had no official letter, paper, and no stamp, so how would anyone believe he had been the minister of education. He took a plain piece of paper and on it wrote, I Jaroslav Stránský and so on, signed it and said, "If they accept this, then I am the Pope." They did accept it and he did not become the Pope.

It was nearly Christmas. I had my visa, so I went to the Cunard Ship line where I had 200 American dollars on deposit from my previous tour in America and I requested passage. At the ship lines, they accepted my request, but told me the next possible passage would not be until April 1949. My passport was only valid until 30 December 1948, but they had no room available. I then requested the return of my money so I could purchase an airplane ticket. But they said if I had money for airfare, they could transfer me to first class for the same price and place me on a ship leaving on the 25th of December arriving on 1 January 1949. It was immaterial to me which way I traveled or whether I received my refund or not if I could get to the US, so I agreed to their proposal.

My passport was only valid until 31 December 1948 and could not be extended because it was a Czechoslovak passport. Once again, I had to go to the home office with a petition for a pass for homeless people, which is called a Nansen's passport. Again, the process took several days before it could be completed and then there remained only one day before the departure of my ship. I hurried with my old and new passports to the consulate, but they were closed. They were in the process of moving to new offices and all the records from passport registrants were in boxes enroute. I took a taxicab to their new offices and after a long explanation and a bit of arguing, I was finally able to find a consulate officer willing to process my peti-

tion. Finally, I was free to leave.

In accordance with CSR law after the putsch, I was not only the Women's Director of ČOS, but I was also the director of the nationwide Federation of Physical Education and Sports. This position brought about an interesting adventure. The parents of a young and very talented figure-skating competitor, Aja Vrzáňová, came to me with a problem. They complained that if they could not obtain an allocation of foreign exchange, then Aja could no longer continue to live and train with her London trainer. The trainer offered to accept her as his guest without any charge until she would turn professional and begin earning money as a figure-skating star. The CSR government officials demanded that the parents recall Aja to Czechoslovakia, because they wanted the final say as to which of their citizens could be trained in a foreign country as a sports competitor. The parents explained that Aja's training had already cost the family all their savings and if Aja were to return to CSR now, her training would end. The figure skating training was what Aja needed to be able to attain an opportunity for a career in the future.

The government officials asked me to intercede on Aja's behalf and direct her to return home and wait to see if the Czech officials would approve her training in a foreign country again. Aja's parents begged her not to return home. They told me that they did not want her to return home now, but only after her training had ended or after she had reached the peak of her ability. I delivered both messages to Aja, and she decided to remain in London.

Aja Vrzáňová remained in London and later when she was to perform in an exhibition, she wanted to invite me, but she did not know my address. At that same time, the world news carried the sensational report that the director of gold medal winning Czechoslovak team was not returning home but was going to America. Aja was convinced that I was now in the US, so she sent the invitation addressed to Mrs. Marie Provažníková, Sokol US. I received the invitation in England. Between the postal workers in the US, where some good soul took the time to research the address of American Sokol and someone in Chicago who found my new address, I received the letter.

The International Commission of the United Nations for Refugees established camps in Germany and Italy for Czechoslovak refugees. Within a short time, Sokol units

within these camps were established with the units in the German camp called a provisional district with the name of Eduard Beneš. This district had elected Dr. Leopold Pospíšil from Olomouc, an anti-fascist and anti-communist as president and Václav Ženíšek from Pilsen as director. The Italian section was headed by a student named Janza and a director named Vladislav Slavík.

How these camps became a provisional district, I am not sure as I received only incomplete information from some of the participants. Alois Lysy, who was the fourth vice-president of the National Socialist Party, proudly told me that provision for the district had been discussed with Br. Hřebík in a meeting of the National Socialist Party. Br. Hřebík, who did not process through the camps, settled in Brussels, but he did visit the camps from time to time. With whom Br. Hřebík consulted about the matter, I do not know, for Br. Ženíšek told me that he had not consulted with him. After listening to Ženíšek and Lysy and confirmed by Leopold Pospíšil, it seems that the only ones Hřebík consulted with were members of his political party. I also believe that because most refugees were members of the National Socialist Party, the bulk of the functionaries were also members of that party, which gave them a clear majority. The National Socialists Party was the most active of those who militarily provided the most assistance to those seeking to reduce or penetrate the communist power in Czechoslovakia.

The consequence of these actions by the National Socialist Party caused their members to face the highest level of danger to their existence. Prior to the putsch, Sokol did not include members of the Folk Party or the Social Democratic Party because they had their own physical culture organization. This was the reason that the refugee camps contained more national socialists as Sokol members than members from other political parties. This fact did not in any way entitle the party to pass a resolution creating a district without ČOS approval. When I rebuked Lysy for this infraction, he protested that without the National Socialists Party, the district would not have been formed. On reflection, I do not think it mattered too much, as the camp organizations were formed to provide the means for physical activities, which were needed as soon as the camps opened.

Next to physical training activity, the highest anxiety for all refugees was obtaining employment affidavits. I had received promises of many affidavits from the US

for suitable candidates who would be willing to become instructors in units or districts throughout America. I asked the district boards to send me the names of brothers who were qualified for such activity. Furthermore, I asked that they give careful and detailed attention to their recommendations, and that I fully expected that further affidavits would be forthcoming if the initial candidates were successful. What I received from them was essentially a roster of members of the National Socialists Party and from this entire list only Ladislav Slavík was still active as an instructor.

An additional activity of the camp district, besides physical training, was the writing and printing of a Sokol camp monthly journal. The publication was edited by Vojta Nevlud who used the pseudonym "April." Each month he sent me a copy in America from which I, in turn, extracted elements, mimeographed them in the basement of the Hus house in New York and mailed them to selected units and individuals.

The most helpful and longest lasting Sokol committee for assistance to the refugee camps was in New York. That committee was not satisfied sending only first aid material to the camps, they also broadened their support to include help with education. When I asked what they needed most, their reply was paper, pencils and books. Perhaps in these camps they maintained Czech schools, but even in some of the camps they did not have the most fundamental means to carry out such a program. The Sokol committee in New York started to produce schoolbooks, which initially were Czech fairy tales and primers. The most substantial helper was V.Y. Rott, the former proprietor of a well-known iron plant in Prague, which was illustrated in some of the books. Together we mimeographed the books and then carted them to the post office for mailing to the camps. The primers we used were the ones used in Czech schools in New York and in Sydney, Australia.

In the camps, the districts' activity was not only adult education. In all units the training was hard. There were public exhibitions and even district Slets. Br. Ženíšek arranged for weekly instructor schools, and in some units the women embroidered flags. Following the disbandment of units, the flags were given to the custody of Br. Hřebík in Chicago. Altogether in the Beneš district there were 2,000 registered members. I mailed their

card index to Vienna just before I moved from the East to the West coast. The camp units slowly closed as their members began receiving immigration visas to various countries around the world. The last unit to disband was the unit Valka, which took part in the Slet entitled, "The Daring Sokols," arranged by Sokol Paris in 1954.

As the physical functions of the Sokols were decreasing, the sound of the Slet's enthusiasm was being carried by the participants into exile. This led to the beginning of new Sokol units being formed wherever the refugees landed. On a proposal by Br. Hřebík, the Sokols who landed in the US were urged not to form new units, but to join existing local Czech or Slovak units. If I am not mistaken, the first new unit was formed in Sydney, Australia, and that is the only one of the new units which remains active today. Several of the new units were founded in Australia at a time when America had very low immigration quotas. Once the flood of refugees abated and an economic crisis occurred in Australia, the restriction on American quotas was cancelled.

In my opinion, the only way a new Sokol District should be created is when a group of Sokol units get together and votes such a district into existence. This, unfortunately, did not happen in the camps and thereby hindered what could have been further development. Some people, and among them some very good Sokols, refused to join the Sokols in exile because they had the impression that they were controlled by the National Socialist Party. Apparently, this political bias endured long after any such possibility was over and Sokols could have been united in the ideals of basic Sokol philosophy. Many people told me they would not associate with Sokol if the leader was Hřebík. This attitude was harmful to us for a long time.

With the parting of the Valka unit, the Eduard Beneš District also vanished as did the last faint echoes of the XI Slet. In its formation and its activity, there was a gradual degradation from the effort of unity for reproducing the whole Sokol program. It had worked to be the whole and it had worked as the whole. The district was the passage between ČOS and Sokol in exile.

This then is the end of the first part of Czechoslovak Sokol. How Sokol fared in the future, how they worked and the efforts to uphold the Sokol ideals, will be discussed, God willing, in the second part of these reminiscences.



**1948 Slet (Festival) in Prague, Czechoslovakia**

Marie Provazníková, Sokol Director of Women, stands next to Czechoslovak President Edvard Beneš. Two months later Provazníková defected from the Olympic Games in London. President Beneš, who reestablished the Czechoslovak Government in 1945, resigned as president in 1948 and died a "broken man" on September 3, 1948. Standing next to President Beneš are the Sokol president and next to him the Sokol Director of Men.



Marie Provazníková with other Sokol leaders in the parade. Two months later she brought the 1948 Czechoslovak Women's Gymnastic team to London where they won the 1948 Olympics.



### 1948 Olympic Gymnastic Champions: Triumph and Tragedy

The Czechoslovak women won the gold medal in the 1948 Olympics, but without Elíska Misáková (in photo), who died of polio in a London hospital on the day of the competition. Her replacement was Věra Růžičková, who had the third highest score of her team. The team returned home with gold medals and Misáková's ashes, but without their inspired leader, Marie Provažníková, who defected.



The opening ceremony at the Olympic Games.



The team returned with gold medals, but Marie Provažníková, who was the president of the Federation of International Gymnastics, defected and came to the US in January of 1949. The legendary leader opposed the Communist Government and faced prison if she had returned.



At age 79, Růžičková proudly holds her gold medal from the 1948 Olympic Games.



### London 1948

Marie Provazníková (far left in photo) stands with Antonín Hřebík and his wife (next to Marie) during the time of the Olympic games. The woman at the far right is Mrs. Daňková, the wife of Sokol London's president. Provazníková was a guest of the Daňeks during her exile in London. Hřebík worked for the Sokol Resistance in 1941 and was sent to Auschwitz. He served as President of Czechoslovak Sokol after World War II, but was removed when he refused to sign a loyalty oath to the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic in 1948. He then defected to Chicago with his wife and worked with the American Sokol Organization, Sokol in Exile and Council of Free Czechoslovakia. Thus, communism drove both Hřebík and Provazníková from their homeland.

# CONCLUSION

The sokol era was the purest in its first 60 years of existence. During that period, membership in Sokol did not bring with it any added advantages. To the contrary, membership for Federal employees proved to be a hindrance to advancement and even some high school students were forbidden to join. Sokol membership was restricted to those who fully accepted and lived by its programs. From these constraints, there developed organizational sincerity and mutual local and national trust.

It is no wonder there were individuals who, in their quest for power, tried to attach to themselves the trust that the nation had for Sokol. This was particularly true during periods of subjugation by foreign dictatorships. Some succeeded, in part, through various pretenses to ingratiate themselves into the organization, but it was not long before they were discovered and the ČOS took appropriate action. During the subsequent debates regarding any action, each Sokol had the opportunity to express their views. The ideals developed by Tyrš were used as the basis to evaluate the individuals in question. Were the opportunists true Sokols? Were the "Brothers of Action," as defined by Tyrš, also the same individuals who worked in the gymnasiums for the benefit of Sokol? Where the

answer was in the negative, the ČOS review committee recommended expulsion.

It was through the ČOS committee system that they were able to control the direction, ideas and working programs which proved so successful in upholding the ideals of Sokol until its forced termination. Tyrš' way proved itself by its highest ideals and true democratic values during the period of the First Republic. It also helped carry the nation through the hardest period in history and with its help it will be active in rebuilding the democracy until its violent cancellation.

I have tried to capture in these memoirs the lessons about Sokol that we learned from Tyrš' "Brothers of Action" and how I was able to follow Tyrš' teachings in my various leadership positions that ended in 1948. The Sokol program had its successes and failures, victories, and disappointments, all growing from the roots planted by Tyrš and Fügner and nurtured by the many Sokol leaders who followed. That was the real Sokol.

To those who sincerely want to continue in Tyrš' Sokol, even in slavery and abroad, I can only add again and again the repeated advice of President Tomás G. Masaryk: "HOLD ON TO TYRŠ! I WOULD GET OUT OF HIM AS MUCH AS I CAN."

Copyright Marie Provazníková, U.S.A.

Munich 1988

Printed by J. Schweigert Co. KG, Munich



This photo was on the cover of a *Czechoslovak Sokol Abroad* journal that honored Provazníková on her 80th birthday for her work for the organization.

## PART III

# NEW LIFE IN AMERICA (1949–1991)



Marie Provažníková was a committed Czechoslovak citizen who defected from the 1948 London Olympic Games for one reason — her imprisonment by the communists in her homeland was imminent. The only family she had were her daughter, son-in-law and three granddaughters, who remained in her communist-controlled country. But fortunately, they escaped and joined her in the US in 1952. This section summarizes Marie Provažníková's life from 1949 until her death at the age of 100 in 1991. Her life and work in her new homeland were characterized by her dedication to both her professional commitments and to her family.

Translations of a few of her writings from the time just before and after she left Czechoslovakia are included in this section. Her work at Sokol New York and with the American Sokol Organization, and international Sokols is described by Norma Zabka, former president of Sokol New York and recipient of the US Gymnastic Hall of Fame award, with whom Provažníková worked closely. Finally, her three granddaughters have written about their family life with her, and a camp student writes about the profound influence that Provažníková had on her during her teen years.

## SELECTED WRITINGS OF MARIE PROVAZNÍKOVÁ (English translations)

In addition to writing *To byl Sokol*, Provažníková authored various articles and books during her years in the US. Two examples noted here were selected as representatives of two of her major interests. First, she believed that Sokol upbringing trains women as leaders and mothers, and helps them raise responsible and healthy children. This topic was addressed in her one-page 1948 article in the publication "Lions by the Power of Honor

and Thanks to Sokols." Her life-long dedication to Tyrš' detailed system of gymnastics inspired her to write a book about the Tyrš' system which was published in 1985. It is important to remember that the goal of these writings was the preservation of the Sokol system internationally during a four-decade long period when Sokol organization in Czechoslovakia was banned.

## Marie Provazníková: *Výklad Tyršovy Soustavy a Názvosloví* (*Interpretation of the Tyrš System and Terminology*)

*Edited by Rudolf Němeček, with illustrations by Magda Schay and Václav Pergl, the book was published in Salem, Oregon in 1985. Provazníková wrote this book to define the teachings of Sokol's founder, who had published his teachings more than 100 years before the publication of her book. This book, as well as *To byl Sokol*, were written late in her life, which underscores her determination to preserve the teaching of the Tyrš system of gymnastics and the history of the Sokol movement. On the second page of *Výklad Tyršovy Soustavy a Názvosloví* (translated as "Introduction with a bit of history"), Provazníková explains the importance of understanding this system.*

### **Introduction with a bit of history**

The Tyrš system was the first and, as far as we know, is still the only scientific gymnastic system. Its arrangement is so logical and consistent that even more than a hundred years after its birth, we can arrange into it any gymnastic movement on any equipment and find a concise and unambiguous name for it. Even movement systems change, but if it is a scientific work, only a duly authorized group of outstanding experts trained in scientific working methods are qualified to alter the system.

At the time of inadequate communication opportunities, some mistakes in names and interpretations crept into the Sokol practice. Therefore, after the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic, one of the first acts of the ČOS (Czechoslovak Union Sokol) Technical Men's and Women's Boards was the publication of a textbook for schools and examinations of the trainer in 1920. At the same time, however, both boards decided to subject the system and nomenclature to a careful revision and formed, for this purpose, an expert council composed of the best experts of the time. The changes made by the professional council were also published in a magazine and disseminated to schools.

The work of the expert council was interrupted by the Munich Agreement and the establishment of the Protectorate. Before the work could be completed, the ČOS was dissolved, and the best expert on Tyrš gymnastics, Dr. Augustine Pechlat, was executed, and most of the men were taken to concentration camps from which many did not return. After the second World War, the expert council never met again. After the demise of Sokol in Czechoslovakia, there were interventions and changes in nomenclature which were brought to foreign units through literature or newly arriving compatriots who joined Sokol abroad. As the only surviving member of the expert council of the Czechoslovak Union Sokol, I considered it my duty to preserve the results of its work, supplemented with their intentions for Sokolism.

Linguistically, the Sokol nomenclature as presented in this book has been approved by the Czech Academy of Sciences. If we want to restore the former unity of speech and mind, we must first make the Sokol abroad familiar with the Tyrš gymnastic system and the legacy of the founder.

## Marie Provazníková: *Sokoly—Matky Zdravěho Národa* (Sokol Women—Mothers of a Healthy Nation)

*The following article (Sokoly-Matky Zdravěho Národa) was written by Marie Provazníková while she was Director of Women, Czechoslovak Union Sokol. It was published in *Lví Silou Pocta a dík Sokolstvu* in 1948. The article was written at the time of the onset of the coup by communists in Czechoslovakia, and the year Marie Provazníková defected from London and the 1948 Olympics.*

Sokol education appeals to all elements of the nation, regardless of age and gender. It is based on unity, and its details and methods are differentiated according to the needs of people in various stages of life.

The importance of this Sokol-based upbringing, which strives for the physical and moral improvement of the nation, is even more pronounced in females than in males. The health education of young people will also be reflected in their ability to mother and in the health of their children. A woman who has learned to regard health as the nation's greatest wealth and has the professional knowledge and experience she gained in Sokol, will be able to raise healthy children. A Sokol-raised mother will instill a work ethic in her children at an early age. She will teach them to respect work and to use all their abilities for the benefit of the nation. The same moral upbringing of Sokol women enables them to raise their children by the same principles that Sokol instilled in them.

The goal of Sokol is the education of the individual, not only for oneself, but for the nation. That is education in the full sense of the word. It will help develop a citizen who is healthy, morally strong, able to work, and will-

ing to devote all his efforts and abilities to the service of the nation. The basic laws of the republic give women the same civil rights, but to this day, women have not applied themselves in public life to the extent that corresponds to their dignity. This phenomenon has many underlying reasons, one of which is a lack of education for public life, an opportunity that men find in both military service and in their professional and social lives. A man lacking skills can attain a higher position through Sokol training and a proper education. Work in the context of unity, especially in training corps, teaches women, from a young age, independent and responsible thinking, decision-making, and democratic cooperation. These are the basic qualities needed in public life. If civil education is the culmination of a person's education, then that culmination is an education for conscription. Sokol upbringing is the basis of physical fitness and endurance, and moral strength combined with a sense of responsibility. Women who experience a Sokol upbringing will not be a burden to the army, but rather valid collaborators who will take on important tasks in the defense of the state.



Provazníková at the podium during the 1956 International Slet in Vienna which she organized.

# MARIE PROVAZNÍKOVÁ: HER PROFESSIONAL AND FAMILY LIFE

*This section addresses Provazníková's contributions to the Sokol movement and international gymnastics, as well as her loving devotion to her family.*

## Marie Provazníková's Professional Life in America

### **Norma Zabka**

Marie Provazníková arrived in New York City Harbor in January 1949 and was met by an enthusiastic group of Sokols. Her many talents were well-known, and she began teaching at Panzer College, in New Jersey, a position that had been offered to her by the college's president, Dr. Margaret Brown while Provazníková was in exile in London. Her work in the 1950s also included teaching gymnastics at Sokol New York, and for three years serving as the club's president. Consistent with her dedication to democracy and freedom, she was a spokesperson for Radio Free Europe and Voice of America. Provazníková was a teacher of teachers, and her work in instructor courses set high standards. She was full of knowledge, a perfectionist and disciplinarian, which I witnessed in my collaborations with her during instructor's courses, planning sessions for Slets and the training of gymnasts. We shared an interest in the inclusion of hand apparatus in gymnastic exhibitions and competitions, and I was honored to co-author a book with her in 1965 (*Gymnastic Activities with Hand Apparatus for girls and Boys: Ages 6-12 years*). She taught in many instructors' courses, which were a priority for providing qualified instructors for Sokol clubs.

The US Olympic Committee asked her to compose a team routine for eight women in preparation for the 1952 Olympic competitions to be held in Helsinki. A team event in women's gymnastics competition was required for the 1952 Olympic Games, and was to be performed with batons. She was asked because of her reputation as a composer of hand apparatus drills and her experience in international gymnastics. Then in 1956, Provazníková created a group drill for Sokol New York women using balls that was performed at the Slet in Vienna, an event organized by her. The group, which included her granddaughter, Zuzka and me, also performed the drill in

other sites in Europe prior to our final stop in Paris. The trip was sponsored by Radio Free Europe.

This legendary Sokol took advantage of every opportunity to train and inspire young people. She created a program at Sokol New York's summer camp in Connecticut for the purpose of a healthy environment for the children of Czech and Slovak refugees that included both physical activities and the learning of Czech and Slovak languages. Her organizational skills were evident during her work in planning Slets in Boonton New Jersey and gymnastic meets for political defectors. From 1951 to 1976 she was a leader and editor of the monthly publication, *Czechoslovak Sokols Abroad*, a journal that provided opportunities for members who left Czechoslovakia after the communist coup. She welcomed Vladislav Slavik, a refugee, and member of Sokol New York, who worked closely with her in that organization for many years and who assisted her in teaching gymnastic instructors. Provazníková served on President Eisenhower's Council of Youth and Fitness during the 1950s. While her family lived in Flushing, NY, she was active in the Astoria Sokol unit, and she took her granddaughters to their gym.

Her contributions to Sokol and gymnastics continued throughout her years in the US, even though she helped raise her granddaughters after they and their parents arrived in America in 1952. During the last decade, when she lived with her granddaughter in Oregon, she wrote her detailed book, *To byl Sokol* (That was Sokol), which is a unique historical account of Sokol.

**EDITORIAL COMMENT.** Norma Zabka was a national Sokol artistic gymnastics junior and senior champion and subsequently played a major role in the development of the relatively new sport of rhythmic gymnastics. She served as an international judge in the sport for three decades, which included 32 international championships. She was inducted into the US Gymnastics Hall of Fame.



### Life in the US

Marie Provazníková greets her three granddaughters in 1952 upon their arrival in New York. Left to right: Zuzka, Anna and Magda.

## Marie Provazníková's Family Life in the United States

### **Zuzka Polesny Eggena, Magda Polesny Schay, Anna VA Polesny**

We, Marie Provazníková's three granddaughters, remember our grandmother, whom we called *Bába*, with love, gratitude, and awe. Always an important part of our lives, she lived in Prague where her energies were directed to Sokol leadership, teaching, advising the government, and women's gymnastics on an international level. Nevertheless, she took time to be with our family in Mladá Boleslav on important occasions and Holidays, and annually at our summer house, Rendlíček, where she spent the war years. The purpose of the tent on the lake property was to introduce us to Sokol camping. And how we loved sleeping on its cots! We remember her most vividly, however, from 1952, the time we lived together as a multigenerational family, when she was an integral part of our growing up and learning to navigate our lives in the United States.

Both during the war and following the communist *coup d'état* our parents shielded us from politics, but in the summer of 1948 when we were four to nine years old,

Zuzka and Magda were aware that she was in London at the Olympic Games and that *Bába* was not coming back.

She had an enormous success at the XI Sokol Slet as well as in the London Olympic Games, but when the exhilarating days of Olympic glory ended abruptly with the much-publicized announcement of her defection, she found herself alone in a foreign land, jobless, without family, a 'stateless alien,' and with no home. Local Sokols, the Daněks, extended their hospitality until she sailed for the United States.

On January 1, 1949, she arrived in the New York harbor penniless and with very few possessions. She rented a room from an older Czech widow in the Bohemian neighborhood on the upper East Side of Manhattan. After her exhausting commute to and from Panzer College in New Jersey, where she had been offered a teaching position, she plunged into Sokol work, including helping Czechoslovak refugees. During this time, she subsisted on bread and coffee, saving everything she could.

In addition to teaching, she wrote and broadcast scripts for Radio Free Europe, the very popular weekly reports about life in a democratic America. It is no wonder that more than once she collapsed from exhaustion on the streets of New York City.

According to our father, our parents were told in confidence, after her Christmas broadcast from London, “if she continued to speak out and participate in political activities, things would end up badly: in those days politically suspect people were relieved of their employment, sometimes their children were removed for upbringing at Communist children’s centers.” Thus, in June 1949, our family with three young daughters escaped by hiking across the mountains of Šumava and we became refugees in the Western zone of Germany where we spent a year in refugee camps. We were among the children in the camp for Czechoslovak refugees in Bavaria who were the happy recipients of clothing and Czech books sent by the organization, Relief of Sokols in Exile which our grandmother had founded. To be granted visas for the United States, it took another two years during which time we lived in the newly formed post Partition West Pakistan where our parents worked as physicians in the Pakistan Army Medical Corps.

Sailing past the Statue of Liberty, our family arrived in New York Harbor in November of 1952. It was a joyful reunion with our *Bába*. She was there on the dock with two well-to-do gentlemen, Br. Kalabza and Mr. Vogel, our sponsor, who brought Cadillacs to pick us up. An enormous surprise awaited us when we reached Flushing, where we were to live. She revealed that she had bought a house — a four-bedroom duplex. It was a marvel that she had been able to save \$500 for the down payment on a \$12,000 house! Our new home was completely furnished and equipped with items lovingly contributed by the local Sokol community, including items claimed from street curbs.

To enable our parents to secure American medical credentials, she managed housekeeping, cooking, and looking after us. The extra burden was reflected in her staying up into the wee hours with her typewriter tapping to keep, through her correspondence, the spirit of democracy and Sokol alive in Communist Czechoslovakia. Of course, she continued her work in the local Sokol and took us to the Astoria unit every week.

Our home was often filled with Czech refugee friends,

primarily Sokols, the intelligentsia, artists, and former government ministers. We especially remember Alice and Olga Masaryk, daughters of President T.G. Masaryk, her dear friend Hana Feierabendová with her husband, politician, and economist, Láda, Marta Hermanová from the refugee camp in Murnau, journalist Ivan Herben, lawyer and journalist Jaroslav Drábek, educator and politician Jarmila Uhlířová, conductor Rafael Kubelík, pianist Rudolf Fiskušný, actor/dramatist Jiří Voskovec, among others.

To keep us away from the sweltering heat of New York and to expose us to fresh country air she spent summers with us in rustic cottages in Vermont, Maine, even Quebec. There we swam, hiked, fished, painted, played, collected driftwood, picked mushrooms and berries. But more importantly, she gave us Czech lessons so that we would not forget our mother tongue, and she read Czech classics to us by the light of a kerosene lamp. One summer she taught Zuzka Latin; after so many decades she remembered enough for Zuzka to score 100% on a final exam for high school credit. She expected excellence not only from herself but from each of us as well.

She secured scholarships from Radio Free Europe to send a small team to the International Sokol Slet in Vienna in the summer of 1956. A plane load of American and Canadian Sokols included not only Marie Provazníková but the 17-year-old Zuzka who was on the New York women’s team that participated in the women’s mass calisthenics and a special routine with balls, both of which Marie Provazníková composed and directed. The group also took a bus tour to visit other cities with local Sokol units and a touching stop in Ötztal where Dr. Miroslav Tyrš, one of the co-founders of Sokol, had perished. In Paris she introduced Zuzka to the Casino de Paris; she was a teacher at heart and certainly no prude!

In the summer of 1956, our family relocated to Cincinnati, Ohio where our father joined the practice of a local ophthalmologist; our mother was to join us a few months later after completing her anesthesiology residency. Because we children still needed someone to look after us, cook us hot meals and generally run the household, she decided to join us in Ohio. It was not until decades later that we grandchildren became aware what an enormous sacrifice this had been, how very difficult it was for her to leave Sokol, the Czechoslovak community of New York City which had become her new home, and

to terminate her decades-long teaching career and her work with American Olympic Gymnastics so that she could take care of the family. Cincinnati had no Sokol units, but she continued to write, to compose for Sokol Slets, to create and record scripts for Radio Free Europe and Voice of America.

Three years later she again moved with our family to Schenectady, NY where our parents established medical practices and she carried on the task of running the household until all three of us left home. Schenectady had a Czech community and was closer to the New York Sokols than Ohio had been, and, as always, she toiled until the early hours of the morning in her basement office corresponding with Sokols all over the world, writing, composing drills and calisthenics for Sokol. During the summers she travelled to Sokol camps both in the United States and in Europe. At the conclusion of a camp on the French island Noirmoutier she spent several weeks travelling in France and walking all over Paris with the then 21-year-old Zuzka; this was a truly unforgettable experience for her eldest granddaughter.

It was not until the early 1960s, when Anna left for college, that *Bába* was finally free of family responsibilities and moved to Long Island City near the Sokol Hall in Astoria, New York where she rented a small, humble ground floor apartment and was once again able to devote her time exclusively to Sokol. She continued the broadcasts, and also gave Czech lessons including to the author Alan Levy who was writing a book about modern Czech history and the politics of the cold war. But she was always available for her family. She traveled to Michigan when Zuzka graduated from medical school and when Magda was the first to move to the West Coast, 3,000 miles from the rest of the family, *Bába* came to spend time with her and her family for a few weeks, usually around the Christmas holidays or during the summer. She dropped everything when she needed to come and take care of Zuzka's little one when another baby arrived early. And after Zuzka's family relocated to California she visited both granddaughters' families for a few weeks each year, usually at Christmastime, so they would not feel so far away from family. She used to remark what a marvel it was to be coming by jet after having been taken to school as a child in a horse-drawn carriage. Magda was grateful that at Christmas she showed her how to make *vánočka* (Christmas cake) and apple strudel, and

in the summer *buchty* (buns) and *koláč* (small pies). During her visits to California her *koblihy* (donuts) as well as *marinovaný úhoř* (marinated eel) were welcome delicacies — she helped in every way she could. While there, she relished the time with her greatgrandsons, delighted in the pleasant weather and her introduction to the Pacific Ocean, and revelled in a stream of visitors from the Los Angeles Sokols who visited her or took her to Sokol meetings and social gatherings.

In the spring of 1979, *Bába* decided that she should no longer live on her own in Long Island City and in April 1979 she moved to Salem, Oregon to live with the Magna Schay and her family, until December 1987. She was a highly disciplined individual who set goals for all moments of her life; we think that she never took a holiday just for pleasure unless it resulted in her achieving a given goal. Upon arriving in Oregon her immediate goals for family wellbeing were to contribute to the family budget by raising rabbits and harvesting dandelion greens for salads, and to teach her great-grandson Alex the Czech language; through no fault of her own, this goal she did not achieve. She celebrated her 89th birthday with Alex's 11th (together a 100th) at midnight of October 10, 1979.

Her lifelong goal was to educate, uphold and to promote Sokol and Sokol values. Settling into her room she created a Sokol Library, a whole wall of books, manuscripts, and Sokol-based data. She continued to be actively involved with worldwide Sokol leadership; checking her mail was the highlight of every day. Besides carrying on a vast correspondence she wrote many articles and two books about Sokol, *Výklad Tyršovy Soustavy a Názvosloví*, and *to byl Sokol*. When in doubt, she referred to her extensive library to make sure that all facts were corroborated.

During the early days of her stay in Oregon, *Bába* developed macular degeneration and needed assistance with her research, and verifying, recording, and proofreading her work. To Magda's knowledge, Salem, Oregon had no Czech community, so *Bába* approached Sokol units in many locations asking Sokol brothers and sisters to help her. As a result, she had long term visitor Sokol helpers from Canada, Chicago, New York; even though Sokol no longer existed in her homeland, a former Sokol student/colleague came from Czechoslovakia to see her. She could not have managed without these individ-

uals who stayed for weeks and sometimes months. Her new electric typewriter did not have diacritics so sometimes adding these on the manuscripts being sent to a publisher was the hapless helper's job. Even when she was in her early 90s, she attended a Slet in Vienna. For entertainment and extra income *Bába* continued writing articles about American life for Voice of America and Radio Free Europe, so Magda's family introduced her to American rodeos as well as life on the Oregon Coast and in Central Oregon.

By her 97th birthday *Bába* needed full time assistance. She returned to her granddaughter, Anna, and son-in-law's home in Altamont, New York. There she continued her Sokol work with the assistance of Sokol sisters who came for extended visits from Czechoslovakia. Ultimately, when even more care was needed, she lived in a nursing home in Schenectady where Anna fondly remembers visiting from California during that time with her three small children and the family dog. *Bába*, her children's *Prabába* (great-grandmother), gave them licorice candies and played games in the garden. Using her cane, she instructed her great grandchildren to go under, over, though, around, while walking, running, jumping, skipping — even making somersaults. Always the teacher, she continued her instructions even from her wheelchair. They loved every moment of their actively engaged time with their beloved *Prabába*.

She proudly wore her *French Legion of Honor* (the highest French honor) and her *St. Sava Cravette* (awarded her by Serbia in recognition for meritorious service) during her 100th birthday celebrations, including one with an official Sokol delegation and another at her daughter's house with family members, local friends

and a cake bedecked with one hundred candles. Birthday wishes arrived from throughout the globe from friends and Sokols, from President George H.W. Bush, and one from the newly liberated Czechoslovakia's President Václav Havel. Despite her remarkable age, poor hearing, and greatly impaired vision, she recorded, in a clear voice, a radio broadcast to the Sokol community worldwide.

Although she longed to return to her beloved homeland, and as the sole survivor of the "Golden Age of Sokol," she refused to return and to die until Czechoslovakia was once again a free democracy. She did live to see a free Czechoslovakia but was never able to go back, passing away at 100 years of age on January 11, 1991. Following a simple ceremony in Schenectady her ashes were taken by her daughter to Prague where they rest in the tomb of prominent Sokols in the Strašnice Crematorium.

Even though she always insisted that she received more from Sokol than she had been able to give, Sokol was the beneficiary of her lifelong labor and dedication. In 1992 she was awarded, in memoriam, the *Order of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk* by President Václav Havel. Then in 2017 the American Sokol Organization recognized her contributions with the first Miroslav Tyrš Honor Award.

It is indisputable that Marie Provazníková made important contributions to the worlds of Sokol, international gymnastics and physical education for women. She lived and breathed Sokol. If she were alive today, she would be called an innovator, a trailblazer, a shatterer of glass ceilings. But from her granddaughters' perspective, she was above all a selfless, loving, and extraordinary, never-to-be-forgotten grandmother.



Provazníková wearing her medals at her 100th birthday celebrations.



## Camp Sokol—East Haddam, Connecticut, US

*Jitka Ludmila Zobal-Ratner*

In her mid-80s Marie Provazníková conceived another Sokol initiative. She created a summer program in a camp owned by Sokol New York and located in East Haddam, Connecticut. The program was for the benefit of the most recent wave of Czech and Slovak refugee children coming to the United States because of the 1968 Soviet invasion. Assembling native Czech cooks, counselors, artists, and general maintenance workers, she was, without question, the director, with all activities at her command. We respectfully called her Mrs. Provazníková (Pani Provazníková in Czech). At an age when others enjoy retirement from their primary occupations, she continued to teach and inspire a much younger generation.

For three summers, when I was 11 to 13 years old, I attended the three-week sleep-away camp. Every adult who attends a sleep-away camp as a child feels that their camp provided the most special experience for them and for their campmates during their early formative years. Camp Sokol gave us the usual experience of being away from our families for an extended period, and instilled in us a sense of personal responsibility and confidence that we could venture out into the greater world without our parents' constant supervision. In addition to those valuable life skills, we were also provided with the opportunity to immerse ourselves in the culture of our birth homeland, Czechoslovakia.

The camp was located at the top of a hill approximately one mile outside East Haddam, a quaint historic town on the East bank of the Connecticut River, approximately 120 miles northeast of New York City. It was built several decades prior to our camp experience. Although records cannot be located to detail the original dates of the camp, it was believed that it was built as a social gathering place for Czech families who had fled World War II. There were two bunkhouses, each with a large open room on each of two floors. The buildings

each housed 30-40 people. The girls slept on the upper floor and the boys slept on the ground floor. Younger children slept at one end of the dormitory and the older children slept on the other end. A bath house and a dining room were also provided.

The purpose of the camp was to provide physical fitness, appreciation for the outdoors, knowledge of Czech and Slovak culture, and instruction in Czech language and literacy. Our day began with physical exercise. We ran down the hill and back up. Returning to the top of the hill, Pani Provazníková led us in calisthenics. We then raised both American and Czech flags on the flagpole. It was considered an honor to be chosen to raise the flags in the morning and lower them at night.

Monday through Friday, we attended class for one hour. Pani Provazníková instructed the older group of children. She taught us the basics of reading, writing and grammar at the first and second grade level. We were also taught Czech history. She wrote on a homemade blackboard with chalk, which she personally lifted onto the table and leaned it against the wall of the bunkhouse. Because it was so rough, the writing on it was lumpy and a bit comical. That chalkboard perfectly epitomized the Czech immigrant spirit of making do with what you have. Although it might be viewed as an imperfect tool for education, it was a perfect tool for yet another life lesson.

My family left Czechoslovakia when I was just entering kindergarten and I had not yet begun my formal education. Thanks to Pani Provazníková, I can read and write in Czech. As children, we neither enjoyed nor appreciated the value of her teaching. As an adult, I am eternally grateful that she took on this task.

After school, we had physical activities including soccer, rope-climbing, races, and other structured activities. Physical activities were followed by lunch. Then we sang Czech and Slovak songs which were taught with equal

seriousness as all the other activities. Afternoon activities varied between arts and crafts, walks in the woods, gathering of firewood for our evening bonfire, picking berries for special desserts, swimming in a lake, or unstructured creative play, all with a Czech cultural twist. After dinner we typically had bonfires, sang songs, took a courage-building solo walk in the dark woods, or participated in treasure hunts, and talent shows. Many of the activities were graded with a system of points. At the end of the camp session, the highest-ranking girls and boys were recognized and given awards. This competitive spirit at the camp helped develop my own competitive edge and has served me well throughout my life. We were only allowed to speak Czech and Slovak in camp. If we were caught speaking English, points were deducted from our cumulative totals. Being assimilated

to our new home, the United States, we all preferred to speak English when the adults were out of earshot. My parents commented, earlier, that I was beginning to lose my ability to speak Czech, but the summers at camp always revived my Czech speaking skills.

In addition to all the typical skills that summer camp adds to a child's life, our camp gave us the opportunity to meet and befriend other children from a small immigrant community and live our shared culture and heritage. All immigrant children wish to assimilate into their new homes. They learn the language and culture much more easily and fully than their parents. At Camp Sokol, we were reminded to honor our origins in a fun and effortless way. On behalf of all the children who attended our camp in East Haddam, Connecticut, thank you Pani Provazníková for making sure we did not forget our roots.



Provazníková with her granddaughter Zuzka and great grandsons.



#### **Four Generations of Marie Provazníková's Family in the US (1987)**

Marie (second row, left) is seated next to her daughter (Alena) and her son-in-law.

Provazníková had just completed her book, at age 97, *To byl Sokol*.

